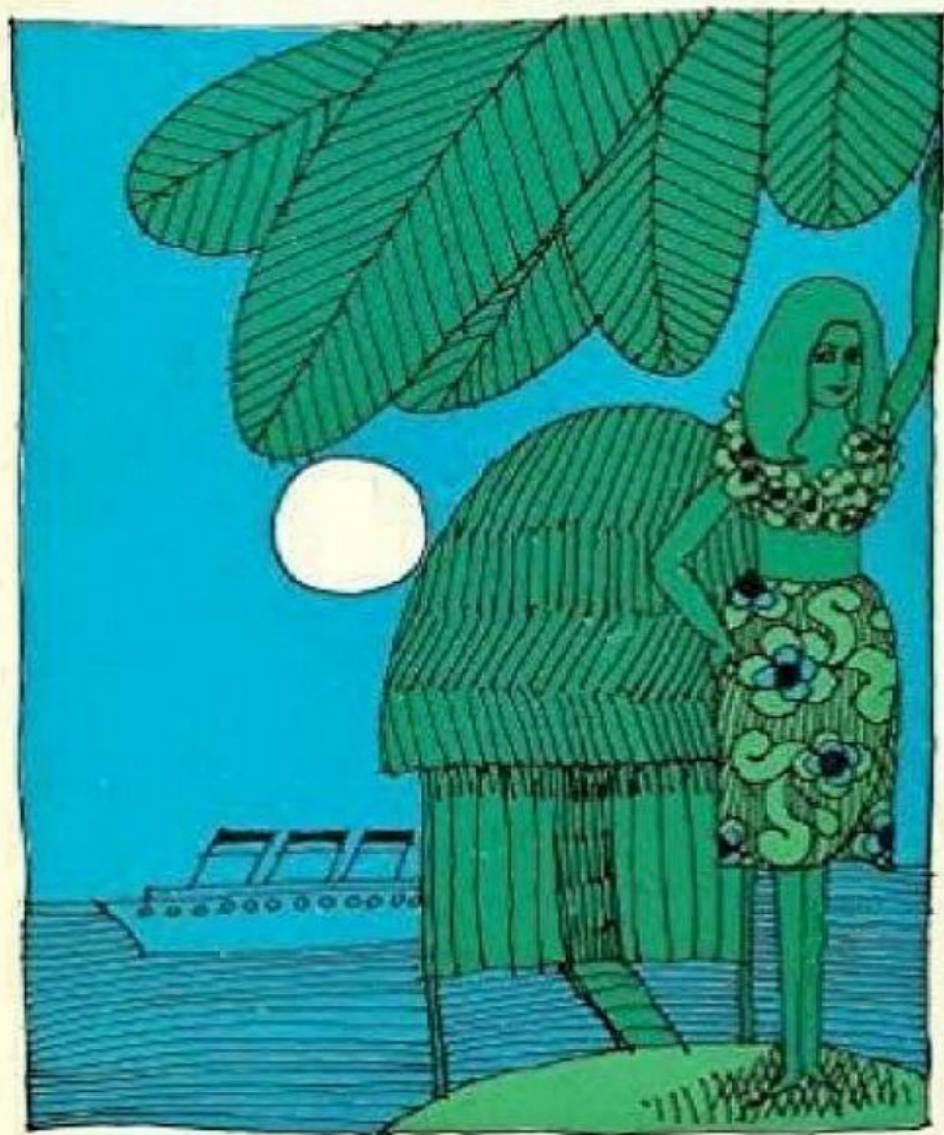


**Two-thirds
of a coconut tree**
H. Allen Smith



Two-Thirds of a Coconut Tree

H. Allen Smith

Two-Thirds of a
Coconut Tree



with photographs

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WAIKIKI BEACHNIK
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HOW TO WRITE WITHOUT KNOWING NOTHING
TO HELL IN A HANDBASKET
TWO-THIRDS OF A COCONUT TREE

Selected by **H. Allen Smith**

DESERT ISLAND DECAMERON

With **Ira L. Smith**

LOW AND INSIDE
THREE MEN ON THIRD

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And in furtherance of the scheme to Keep Tahiti Tahitian, it is decreed that no building shall be higher than two-thirds of a coconut tree.

— Building Code of Tahiti.

Two-Thirds of a Coconut Tree

November 23

I STOOD again today amidst the bustling crowds at Powell and Geary here in San Francisco and waited for the sign to tell me to *Walk*. I looked at all the people and thought, This is the way it was three years ago when I stood at this corner. And this is the way it has been every day since, while I was off in Mount Kisco and Manhattan and Merida and Dallas and Mexico City and Hot Springs and Boston. This is the way it was in every city — the hordes of human animals charging back and forth across a million busy intersections, all around the world, and nobody really knowing for sure what it is all about. I tell you, when a man gets into the Golden Fifties he is bound to think vast and wondering philosophical thoughts and also he belches more than formerly.

The first snow of the winter was falling when we left Mount Kisco three days ago — a fitting farewell for a couple bound out for the tropics. We sail tomorrow on the S. S. *Mariposa* and ten days later will be in Tahiti.

We go by ship out of prejudice, because it is a pleasant and luxurious way to travel and because the flying ovens of our great technological era make me nervous. A couple of nights ago Charlie Regal took us to the San Francisco Press Club where we met several local newspapermen and their wives. And I, being an Eastern Sage, felt the need to show my sapience and so I observed that our project for putting a man on the moon is somewhat premature. On the very day that nine billion dollars were appropriated to shoot a man to the moon, the aeronautical sciences were just barely able, after seven hours of crazy delays and airport changes and equipment substitution, to get me from New York to Boston. I could almost have done it trotting.

We have seen some old friends here. Robert L. Dickerson has come up from Newport Beach. He is known to us as Moby Dick, a name bestowed upon him by a Mexican friend when we were all enjoying the pleasures of Veracruz together a few years back. And Moby Dick has made us acquainted with Charlie Morse, head of the Ferry-Morse Seed Company, who drove us on our first trip to Monterey and Carmel.

Charlie Morse, a man who looks exactly what he is — chairman of the board of a big corporation — is a most unusual American. Now and then during our ride down the peninsula he would make a wrong turn, or fail to notice a stop sign, or jam on his brakes too abruptly, and each time that he erred he would say, “Damn a man like me!” Or, “What is the matter with me?” Or even, “They shouldn’t allow me to

drive at all!" Never once did he blame the other drivers on the highway, even though in some cases they were clearly at fault. Never once did he howl cusswords at them. Charlie Morse, it is plain to see, has not adjusted to civilized living.

Rufus Blair, who has retired to the redwood forests after many years of beating the drum for actors at Paramount, spent yesterday with us and accompanied me on a last-minute shopping expedition. I bought pastel slacks and skin-tight swimming pants. Rufus has always had a towering dislike for Los Angeles, which he calls Double Dubuque, whereas San Francisco has long been his favorite town in all the world. He is a man inclined to flamboyant outbursts of rage against the Planet Earth and its subdivisions and I was surprised to witness such an explosion directed against San Francisco. I needed a light raincoat and he said Roos-Atkins and led me to the Roos-Atkins corner and Roos-Atkins was no longer there. The whole ground floor had been ripped out and there was scaffolding all over the building and wooden fencing along the curb. A sign proclaimed the fact that a bank would be opened on the site. Rufus was furious. Roos, he said, had always been here and by god Roos was here now, somewhere in there. He said come on we'll bust through the god damn fence and find Roos. I gentled him away from the place because I was afraid he would get inside and attack the construction people with a two-by-four. We went on to another store, Rufus grumbling, "Crazy god damn fat-headed town, getting as bad as Double Dubuque."

I was up at daybreak yesterday to appear on a television program with Al Jazzbo Collins, a transplanted New Yorker who wears a black beard and coveralls and whose behavior on TV is somewhat cool and groovy. I told him that recently I read a long newspaper story about a young San Francisco man named Merle Peterson, described as "a disillusioned millionaire with a 75-foot schooner." Mr. Peterson was getting ready to sail through the South Pacific in search of the perfect woman. He didn't say what for. He is thirty, a building contractor, divorced, and he said: "I can't find what I want in America — the whole society and culture here has a bad streak in it." Mr. Peterson was described as being of medium size and ordinary appearance except for a small goatee; but never mind his looks — it's the million dollars that counts. I told Mr. Jazzbo Collins that I intend to pick up his trail, follow along behind, and have a try at his discards and rejects. I think I'd be satisfied with the ones he casts aside. He's thirty and a millionaire. I'm fifty-three and a thousandaire. I'm not too picky.

I have been itching to see Tahiti for a long time, and the thing that galvanized me into action was an interview not long ago in John Crosby's column. Mr. Crosby was dabbling around the French Riviera

and fell into conversation with Frederick Loewe, who composed the music for *My Fair Lady* and *Brigadoon* and *Camelot*. Mr. Loewe was living on his yacht at the time and Mr. Crosby was interested in yachts. He asked Mr. Loewe why he had acquired the handsome vessel. Said Mr. Loewe: "I think if you're inclined to the sea at all, it's the dream of every boy to own a yacht and sail off to the South Seas."

On the television program I told Mr. Jazzbo Collins that I felt sure Mr. Loewe was attracted to Tahiti by the stories and pictures he had seen of the tan-skinned maidens who know nothing of the camisole. I have always been so attracted. Mr. Collins changed the anatomy. "I have heard," he said, "that you are interested in fingers." I said that I was, indeed, and had written a learned paper entitled *A Short History of Fingers*. Mr. Collins said that he likes fingers too but that he is even more interested in ears.

"Strange," I said, "that you should have such an interest. It may well be that my own ears have something to do with my sensual urge to visit Tahiti."

I told him (and the television audience) about a convention of doctors held recently in Italy. One of them, a Dr. R. Ruggles Gates of London, read a paper on his investigation of hairy ear rims. He said that only males have hair growing on their ear rims and that nearly all the sons of men with hairy ear rims inherit the trait from them. The Y chromosome or male sex determinant is responsible for this condition. Dr. Gates didn't put it in so many words but I imagine that hairy ear rims indicate a great abundance of Y. The suggestion is strong that a man with a lot of hair on his ear rims is a man with powerful sex urges.

"You should see the rims of my ears," I said. "I have to *shave* them once every week."

Mr. Collins inspected my ears with a magnifying glass and exclaimed over them. "Man," he said, "you are the hairy-earedest. I mean the hairiest-eared. Hey, boys, let's get one of these ears on camera."

They dollied in and filled the screen with my right ear and let the people look at it for a long time while we talked. I don't think anybody else's ear ever has been given that much intimate and prolonged attention on television.

Yesterday was our second Thanksgiving Day in San Francisco and we dined on roast goose at the home of Morris and Frances Watson. A lovely, invigorating discussion took place during dinner, growing out of the fact that Morris and Frances have willed their bodies to Stanford University. A lot of people are bequeathing their bodies to science these days and the laboratories are beginning to get a little particular about what they'll take. Before long it may be that the

scientists will require that people come in for a physical examination before their bodies are accepted. Think of it. Suppose you wanted to will your body to Stanford, and they called you in and examined you and then said no, no good. Having your body rejected even for dissection — that would be the ultimate in embarrassment.

We talked about other funerary matters and Morris said that California law now forbids the scattering of human ashes, on sea or land or anywhere else. Altogether a quite satisfying Thanksgiving.

November 24

WE HAVE an elegant suite on the *Mariposa* but our sailing party this morning was small. The Ray Hasenauers and Moby Dick and John Pincetich and Charlie Regal were all present, and Ruth Morse came with a present from her husband Charlie, the seed king. Charlie sent a thing called a Gro-Kit, containing seeds of the Brownie Scout Marigold. I think Charlie Morse missed the point. I had asked him for some special seed to take with me to Tahiti, something on the order of *Amorphophallus titanum*.

Years ago when I was a newspaper reporter the New York Botanical Garden had an *Amorphophallus titanum* on hand. It came from Sumatra and was said to be the biggest flower on earth. It was getting ready to bloom, an event that had never occurred before in the United States, and so I went up to the Bronx to witness the event. The officials of the botanical garden said that when the plant bloomed it gave off one of the most frightful smells ever to affront the human nose. As I remember, this stinking flower was twelve or fifteen feet high and vulgar-looking. Its name means big, shapeless phallus. For people who don't like to use such language, it is called a krubi.

I had told Charlie Morse that by tradition all the early explorers of the South Pacific carried seeds with them and scattered them around the islands. I wanted to do the same, but with a somewhat different twist. I wanted to take the seeds of some big ungainly plant with me and scatter them secretly all over Tahiti and surprise the people. But I don't think Mr. Morse was listening. I certainly didn't have a Brownie Scout Marigold Gro-Kit in mind.

The noisiest sailing parties on the ship were those given for a large contingent of men and women from the travel agencies of San Francisco and neighboring towns. Running down the coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles, the Matson ships have quite a bit of empty space and so they give the travel agency people a free ride. In staterooms all over the ship these people were gulping champagne and their friends were yelling Bon Voyage and Aloha and there was much kissing and hugging. All these happy people had their sailing parties and then they dined and danced a while and went to bed. Tomorrow morning they'll get up with hangovers, leave the ship and drag themselves unhappily back to San Francisco. We watched them for a while tonight in the *Mariposa's* Polynesian Club where the fat Hawaiian band leader, called Pua, does a sort of crab hula. He revolves and jerks his stomach and, at the same time, does a great deal of scratching from the ankles upward while singing of love and passion and sea and sand and stars. Different styles of the hula have

different designations. I would call Pua's the Blue Ointment Hula.

November 25

WE RODE a taxi from Wilmington to the Malibu Beach home of Fred and Neill Beck and Nelle remarked that we left home in snow and rain and had rain most of the time we were in San Francisco and here it was raining in Ellay. I said, "You are a fine little helper. You have given me a marvelous title for my book about the South Pacific. *Rain*. I'll call it *Rain*. Might even go well on Broadway."

Fred Beck is an old friend and has established a tradition under which he always sees us off whenever we head into the Pacific, having done it once before already. He is a man of steady habits. He drinks steadily. And it is his custom to down a beaker of cold clam juice every morning of his life — clam juice with a dash of tabasco and a pinch of celery salt. He claims that this is all that keeps him alive and whenever he goes traveling he carries a case of the stuff in the trunk of his car for fear he'll wander into some uncivilized domain where they don't have clam juice.

The Becks are giving up their Malibu Beach house and building a rustic lodge near Ketchum, Idaho. Idaho is one of our states. There are certain states in the Union for which I sorrow. One is Mississippi. I bleed for Ole Miss because she is at the bottom of every catalogue of civic failure and distress, and this requires a lot of hard and determined work on the part of her citizens in order to heat out forty-nine other states. I have long sympathized, too, with Rhode Island for the reason that she is forever being dropped inside the boundaries of other geographical areas to demonstrate how small they are. And I have compassionate feelings about Idaho because she is a desolate and forlorn commonwealth. Until I deliberately investigated the matter I never heard of anybody who ever came from Idaho, unless maybe Borah and he was born in my own southern Illinois. And I never heard of anybody who ever went there. Oh, yes, I have heard of Sun Valley but we in the East sort of figure it is in Utah or Jackson Hole. But now the small town of Ketchum, which broke out of obscurity when Hemingway killed himself there, is going to do additional service to Idaho by becoming the operational base of Fred Beck. I told Mr. Beck that he ought to write a book about his new homeland and he said he is already planning one. I had a title to suggest but he said he already had settled on one. He told me that one of the principal agricultural products of Idaho is a forage crop called rape, a brassicaceous plant whose leaves are favored by sheep and whose seeds yield up a product called rape oil. Mr. Beck wants to call his book *Idaho: Land of Rape*. A fine and fitting tribute *pro patria*.

A highlight of our day with the Becks was the playing of an hour-

long tape. Mr. Beck had recently rounded up a man named Jack Pugh who had just come back from a year in Tahiti and, using a tape recorder, he interviewed Mr. Pugh on my behalf. It was an interview done in the manner of Pete Martin of the *Saturday Evening Post*, with one noteworthy improvement in technique: I, the interviewer, didn't even have to be there.

This Jack Pugh had been associated with Lloyd Rigler, the man who runs the Adolph's Meat Tenderizer company. Mr. Rigler bought a hotel in Tahiti, called the Royal Tahitian, and sent Mr. Pugh out to look after it. I suspect that Mr. Rigler became interested in Tahiti originally because the meat on the island, imported and domestic, is said to be as tough as whitleather. To a man who sells tenderizer, a real tough piece of meat must be as alluring as the loveliest pair of tan knockers in the whole South Pacific.

Among the things said into the tape recorder, which we ran off there by the shore of the Pacific with the surf booming against Mr. Beck's front yard, were these:

1. The rats in Tahiti are enormous, a foot and a half long, and wriggle through the thatched roofs of the dwellings, and have been known to bite sleeping people on the elbows. Mr. Beck asked Mr. Pugh why the elbow and Mr. Pugh said he didn't know unless rats just naturally prefer that joint.

2. Each habitation is infested with white lizards, four to seven inches long, living in the thatched ceilings or clinging to the upper molding of the rooms; these animals keep down the voracious mosquitoes, but their droppings constitute a great nuisance. It is necessary to scrub the floors and the furniture and change the bedspreads daily because of lizard droppings.

3. The lizards don't get *all* the mosquitoes.

4. The spiders are as big as saucers and like to hang around bathrooms.

5. Kitchen help and maids and gardeners in Tahiti always come to work late, averaging about an hour in their tardiness. People have to become accustomed to getting their breakfast at least an hour later than they want it. Mr. Rigler made a terrible mistake by installing a time clock at his hotel, precipitating a rebellion of a ferocity to compare with the French Revolution. Tahitians simply will not be enslaved by the clock.

6. The Chinese chef at the Royal Tahitian did the shopping for supplies. It was his custom after loading up at the stores to stop by his home and distribute a good portion of the groceries to his family and friends. This is a common custom among the Chinese of Tahiti, as it is among the Americans of the United States.

7. There are trillions of large cockroaches in Tahiti, running loose

in all the kitchens; they are looked upon as friendly and nice by Tahitians, who sometimes talk to them as they work. In the homes of white people when the Tahitian maids are told to kill cockroaches, they do it by stamping on them with their bare feet.

8. The bad weather is just coming on now. It will rain cats, dogs, buckets and sheets from now until March.

9. There is absolutely nothing to do in Tahiti if you don't care about fishing and one additional pursuit. Swimming is bad because the beaches are no good. The few night clubs where there is dancing are hell-holes. There are more wild animals running around in the movie theaters than there are people.

10. As for sex in Tahiti, by American standards everything is cockeyed and contrary to the way we have it at home, but nevertheless very exciting. Mr. Beck interposed (on tape): "That's exactly the way I feel about Idaho."

Mr. Pugh said he spent his year in Tahiti and then returned to California and went into another business —manufacturing artificial parsley, which cannot be eaten but is nice for decoration. In the course of the taped interview he recommended that when I get to Tahiti I establish contact with a certain Aurora Natua, formerly head of the Tahiti Museum and a recognized authority on the history and folklore of the island.

And so with heavy hearts and thoughts of drenching rains and lizard droppings and enormous rats and outsized cockroaches, we rode back to the *Mariposa* with the Becks, had dinner with them on board, and expressed the hope in parting that they would meet with good fortune and plenty of cold dam juice in the Land of Rape.

November 26

BEFORE HE went ashore last night Fred Beck handed me a carbon copy of a column he has written for the Los Angeles *Times*. He put it together yesterday while I was taking a walk on the beach. When I read it this morning I found that Mr. Beck fully comprehends my desire to take some seed with me to Tahiti. He got the wrong vegetable but the right purpose. Here are the pertinent paragraphs of his column:

So — before H. Allen Smith sailed from L.A. aboard the *Mariposa* he bought eighty-five pounds of Giant Cucumber seeds.

It so happens that cucumbers are unknown in Tahiti. Smith's plot is this: late some dark night after all the beach boys and hula dancers and Great White Lizards and tourists are asleep, Smith will go sneakity-sneak into the hibiscus swamps and the orchid forests and he will plant Giant Cucumber seeds.

He will plant them on the hills and on the plains, by the roadsides and in public parks and on the lawns of the Royal Tahitian, which is closed for repairs.

Nobody will know that Smith has planted seeds. And when Spring comes the natives and the Mahoonies — all will be aghast! Amazed! A mysterious new plant is rampant from Papeete Junction to Gauguin Heights!

Cucumbers! Giant Cucumbers! Everywhere one looks — lush, huge cucumbers! Who could ask for anything Moa?

Now why is H. Allen Smith doing this? To cause confusion, which is first cousin to good clean fun maybe? No! No sir. He is doing it for the same reason that J. Appleseed planted apple seeds. He is doing it to help folks, in this case Polynesian natives. And Mahoonies.

We are now on the broad bosom of the Pacific and Nelle has been making friends right and left, mostly among widows. My friend Dick Joseph of *Esquire* has observed that the natives of the South Pacific believe the United States to be populated by only two kinds of people — rich old widows and young sailors. One widow told Nelle that her late husband was a judge, “six feet four and every inch of him good.” She was speaking of his height. She brought forth a

mimeographed eulogium, containing tributes to The Judge written by his friends. "I've tried to get the *Readers Digest* to print it," she said, "but they lack good judgment." Nelle observed later that she has never met a traveling widow whose husband was not the finest and noblest and most devoted man who ever slapped shoe-leather. This would seem to be a subject for study — why such widows go about the world praising their departed husbands beyond all reason, at the same time, if they are on the tender side of seventy, trying to get every man in sight into the hay.

At the Bingo game in the ship's lounge tonight a nine-year-old boy passed the pencil stubs to the players. It occurred to me that his presence on board brings the average age of the passengers down to about seventy-six. There are at least two in wheel chairs and half a dozen others have to be led wherever they go. These semi-invalids are on board in violation of a Matson Line rule. The regulation states that no person can go on a Matson cruise unless he is able to make it up the gangway under his own power. The violators of the rule are obviously people of wealth and influence; they know somebody who knows somebody and they manage to get special permission. That's the way the world turns.

Later in the bar I fell into conversation with a white-haired couple from Chicago. The man had some kind of palsy and they both looked gray and seamy. We got to talking about world travel and I remarked that I wanted to do my roaming while I was still young and virile and vigorous, which I sometimes suspect I am. Mr. E., whose hands were shaking so he could hardly hold his glass, turned to his wife, who was hard of hearing, and repeated my statement in a high, cracked voice, and then he turned back to me and quavered, "Exactly the way *we* feel." People don't seem to realize it when they've grown old. I have no doubt that somebody looked at Nelle and me this evening and said, "They waited too long, the poor things!"

November 27

There was a lecture about Tahiti in the lounge today. The ship's tour director, Joe Boyd, touched lightly on the island history and nobody in his audience seemed interested, though there were snickers when he said the tomb of the last king is surmounted by a giant-sized Benedictine bottle, this being the beverage the monarch used in drinking himself to death. Mr. Boyd said that we would be docking on a Sunday morning and that very likely all the stores would be closed. This intelligence was greeted by a great chorus of groans and protests. The primary purpose of travel is to shop. Nuts to history. Nuts to the scenic glories of the South Pacific. Piddle on the natives of Polynesia. Accumulating junk is the thing to do.

We have a celebrity on this trip, The Congressman. He is young and handsome and affable and comes from a state in the central part of the country. I sat with him today in the theater where they were showing movies of Tahiti and he revealed himself as a great enthusiast for all the Isles of the Pacific. If and when the people bounce him out of office, he'd enjoy living in the South Seas.

We eat at the table of the Chief Purser, Jim Yonge, whose name sounds Chinese but who is of Dutch ancestry, born in Hawaii, resident now of San Francisco. Also at our table is Miss Hibiscus, a dark-haired thing out of Fiji, where she won the annual beauty contest. Her name is Laurayne Thurley, she is eighteen, and I would guess that one of the reasons she was crowned Miss Hibiscus was her shape. It is provocative.

Also present is Freddie Field, a young New Zealand travel agent, and his mother, known to one and all as Mums. Freddie is alert and well informed. He said that in Los Angeles a waitress who talked like a TV cawmick listened to his New Zealand speech and then said, "Where you folks from?" Freddie replied, "New Zealand." And the waitress exclaimed, "My! And you speak such good English."

At dinner when the wine is poured Freddie warns Mums to take it easy, explaining to the rest of us, "One wine biscuit and a glawss of water — that gets the old girl shickered as a bat."

I asked Mums how many children she had and she said, "I brought forth six but I've buried two."

FREDDIE: "I'm one of the two she buried."

MUMS: "You've heard the saying - only a mother could love 'im."

MR. YONGE: "But it doesn't necessarily mean his mother."

MISS HIBISCUS: "Here's the wawtuh."

November 28

THERE ARE several talented fag impersonators on board, members of the crew who impersonate female impersonators. This has become a great parlor sport in the United States, possibly because of the spread of homosexuality. It used to be that the star performer at parties was the guy who could do Negro and Hebrew dialect; now it's the guy who can make like a nance. I hear rumors that there may be a few True Believers, or Authenticated Faggots, among us on the *Mariposa*. In the light of this I was upset by something that happened today. I asked Nelle to have the girl in the beauty parlor come to our stateroom and give me a manicure. The girl said: "I certainly will not. You tell him to bring his fingers down here — we have men in for manicures all the time, and it's always a ball. If Captain Stone can come to the beauty salon for a manicure, then Mr. Smith can come." I held off for a few hours but finally went down and the girl put me in a chair near the doorway so everyone could see. Within a few minutes all my new friends of the staff, including Chief Purser Yonge and his various assistants, and the gay and handsome nurses from the Surgeon's Office, and various bellboys and stewards, began moving back and forth in the corridor, pretending that they were on errands of one kind or another, glancing in, seeing me, bugging their eyes and registering shock, and after that making unseemly and vulgar remarks. And the amateur fag impersonators impersonated fags, hands on hips, telling the girl to take good care of my pinkies. But I weathered it out and actually began to enjoy it because the performances were expert and funny and so I resolved to fetch my fingers to the salon again before Tahiti.

Among the passengers is Jack Hausman, who has been a traveling salesman most of his life. Today he and I were discussing the attitudes that people develop to go along with the trade they are in. I recalled something about the people who operate carnival freak shows. These people have a special attitude toward physical deformity: they are strongly in favor of it. And they have, nowadays, a bitter complaint to make against the medical profession. "Listen," they say, "do you know that every day of the year two-headed babies are being born in our hospitals? *Every day of the year!* And you know what them dirty doctors do? They *kill* 'em! The dirty bastards kill off the finest freaks a man could ask for! *They* are the ones oughta be killed, the dirty dogs!"

Mr. Hausman said that traveling salesmen also have occupational attitudes. "In the selling game," he said, "the rule says that you are supposed to like people period. Not true. You love the people you can sell. You hate the guts of the people you can't." He told the story of

two salesmen meeting in a Los Angeles hotel lobby.

Says the first: 'You know that nasty old mother-lover Herman Huggsby in San Bernardino?'

Says the second: "Oh, sure. I can't sell the old son of a bitch either."

Authors of books sometimes have attitudes growing out of their basic pursuits. I have been reading a book about the South Pacific, written by a roving botanist. He visits island after island, including even Pitcairn, and indulges in rhapsodic descriptions of the flowers and shrubs and trees, and now and then in passing he mentions that there were some people around.

Jack Hausman said that a rich old widow passenger told him, "We've got a writer on board incognito." Mr. Hausman asked, 'What's his name?' She replied, "I don't know his real name but his incognito name is Smith." Mr. Hausman then asked, "What does he write?" The rich old widow responded, "He wrote a book called *Suds in Yer Eye*."

A word from the vocabulary of the New Zealand passengers is spreading around and being used by non-New Zealanders. It is the word "condition" as meaning human blubber. At our table Mums Field was telling how her late husband could never gain weight. "I decided," she said, "to put some condition on him if it killed me." To put some condition on him meant to fat him up. Now many of the passengers are speaking of their need to *take off* some condition.

Captain Stone gave a big cocktail party tonight and I was talking to him and he asked me why I had turned down his invitation to eat at his table. I told him that we sat at the Captain's Table once during an Atlantic crossing and found the company too stiff and Emilyposty. "Well," said Captain Stone, "that has not been my experience at all." He then observed that celebrities and near-celebrities and wheeler-dealers who often sit at the Captain's Table are inclined to drink overmuch, and argue religion, and argue politics, and discuss sex openly, and tell dirty stories, and cop feels under the table, and sometimes threaten one another with fisticuffs. The Captain's Table, said the Captain, is the least boring table in the dining room.

November 29

ACCOMPANIED Chief Steward Joe Colton and Captain Stone on a tour of inspection of the crew's quarters. In some respects the crew has it better than the passengers. There's no such thing as a rat-infested fo'c'sle. The galleys are glistening with stainless steel and big handsome refrigerators and good-smelling food. During such inspection trips a captain always takes special care in looking at showers and toilets. Captain Stone told me of serving once under an old Swedish skipper who, on inspection tours, would bend over a toilet, sniff a couple of times, then straighten up and exclaim, "Sweet as an apple!"

There are many tensions among the crew and frequent arguments and quarrels that sometimes approach violence. But there is a rule that says that if a blow is struck, or hair pulled, or face scratched, the offender's "papers are pulled" and he or she can never ship out again. Consequently all such disagreements are saved up for shore leave — the clobbering and the clawing is allowable only on shore. It is not unusual for several crew members to return from shore leave in the Amorous Isles with teeth missing, lips puffed, eyes discolored and gobs of hair missing.

There is a notice posted in Mr. Colton's office saying that crew members from the *Mariposa* have been involved in seventy-five motor scooter accidents in Tahiti. Some resulted in broken bones and other severe injuries. The notice concludes with an appeal: **take a taxi, take a bus, or walk!**

This was Sadie Hawkins Night, beginning with dinner, and things started off childishly and got more infantile as they went along. I thought of the short story Norman Matson wrote years ago about a party in the home of a fashionable family. He described the behavior of the people scattered over the drawing room. Helen and Jeanne got into an argument over Paul, and Helen slapped Jeanne and in a moment they were on the floor, scratching and biting and pulling hair. Soon Paul and Charlie were squared off, swinging their fists. Then Margaret got mad at Sue and threw her drink in Sue's face. It went on and on and the reader begins to think, I've known people who behave like this. And then the story arrives at its conclusion and you find that all these misbehaving people are little children.

During the hayseed dancing I found myself sitting next to a lady who was actually from Pasadena and I asked her if she was a rich widow. She said no. She said she knows many rich widows of Pasadena and she described them as being predatory and feline and sanguinary in battle. She said they have become so overweening on

cruises and in tropical resort areas that when they meet a man who strikes their fancy, they will say to him, "I am a rich old widow from Pasadena. You're mine."

November 30

THERE ARE many people on the *Mariposa*, including of course the crew and staff, who know Tahiti pretty well. The people of the island who are talked about most are a builder named Ripley Gooding; an airline manager named Mme. Jeanne (pronounced John) Jacquemin; Bengt Danielsson, an anthropologist with long whiskers; Baldwin Bambridge, member of an old Tahiti family; a hotel manager named Ralph Varady, whose book about Moorea I have recently read; the daughter and the widow of James Norman Hall; a writer and lawyer named Bill Stone who has been a long time in Tahiti; the natural son of Paul Gauguin; and a handsomely seductive demimondaine called Thousand Franc Colette.

The *Mariposa's* paneled library has shelves containing books on Tahiti, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa, Hawaii — all places which the ship will visit. I seem to be the only person on board patronizing those shelves. I've kept a check on them, as well as on the reading matter favored by the other passengers. They are, for the most part, Perry Mason readers although there are a few who are reading the current best-sellers, such as Shirer's book and the biography of Sinclair Lewis. Nobody gives a damn about acquiring any information on the ports and islands they are going to see.

In the last year or so I have been more than a little amused at the new trend back home to defend the behavior of our tourists in foreign lands. Many of our newspapers and magazines and radio and television people are now saying that American tourists are not such a bad lot, that there are only a few jerks, only a handful of Ugly Americans. On the basis of my own observations I insist that a majority of the Americans traveling in foreign lands are guilty of such hideous conduct that they ought to be forbidden passports. There is need for a sort of security check against idiocy, a screening out of loudmouthed boors. There is such a thing as being too outgoing.

I was discussing this matter with Miss Fogarty, a young New Zealand newspaperwoman who has been visiting New York and is now on her way back to Auckland. She also has noted the lack of interest in books about the South Pacific. She supports my opinion that the Number One objective of the passengers in Tahiti (as elsewhere) is shopping. Number Two, she says, is the Pub Crawl — an organized tour of the Papeete night clubs.

Our waitress Renee indulges in marvelous mispronunciations. She was talking today about store-aways. She had reference to people who store away on ships. She said there was a girl store-away who got on the *Mariposa* once at Los Angeles, attended a sailing party, hid herself

until after the ship departed, then went immediately into labor and had a baby in the ship's hospital — all modern conveniences and no charge.

Renee asked me if anybody ever told me there was a movie actor I looked like. "You remind me of him very much," she said. I told her not to tell me such things, that I would become impossible for the remainder of the voyage. I said what's his name. She couldn't think of it but she gave me dribs and drabs of information about him under my quite casual urging. A comedian sort-of, English type like, played husbands always sneaking out on their wives to grab a quick drink or two. He was really big in the Shirley Temple days. My God, I thought, could she be thinking of stiff-lipped Roland Young? I asked if he had a little thin mustache and thin hair and a habit of talking without moving his lips. "That's he!" cried Renee. It was Roland Young. I told Renee: "There's something about you that makes me think of Edna Mae Oliver." She said: "Edna Mae Who?"

December 1

HARRY WARD, who works on Matson freighters and is having a vacation on this cruise, told me today that there used to be a tribal chief in the islands who made it a condition of cooperation with the Matson ships that he be allowed to come aboard and have exclusive use of the automatic elevator for two hours. He would spend the two hours running the elevator from Promenade to Main and back to Promenade, sometimes shrieking with laughter; after that the Matson people could have anything they wanted on his island.

Someone else told me that Matson has to take precautions against the multitudes of litigious people who roam the world today looking for somebody to sue. Just recently the line has paid \$100,000 to a woman who slipped and hurt herself on the gangway. It is necessary to have a sign posted saying it is forbidden to jump or dive into the swimming pool. In the ship's newspaper the company disclaims any responsibility for errors in stock market quotations. Once a prominent businessman collected \$100,000 because his Big Thoughts were disturbed late at night by a group of Christian Scientists indulging in a Sing Along near his stateroom. He charged that this choral concert was not on the schedule of activities and should not have been allowed; because of it he unthought a big deal. The world is full of bastards, and the law is often an ass, an idiot.

A shipboard mystery has been solved. There is a male passenger among us, a man of almost classical handsomeness. He is trim of body, white-haired but not much over forty or forty-five, with a crisp military-type mustache, his face lined in a way that suggests desert and sea — taken altogether he has a strong resemblance to the late Ronald Coleman. Dashing, debonair, poised. All of us have tried to figure him out. Nobody seemed to know his business. Some guessed he might be commander of a battleship, and someone else saw him as an officer in the Queens Hussars.

Today we found out. He runs a telephone answering service in a California town.

December 2

IT OCCURRED to me today that I am a collector of bores, in the same sense that a resident of the Hudson Bay country is a collector of snow. Nudniks somehow gravitate toward me. A round dozen men and women on this ship thus far have shown me snapshots of their tiny tots or their grandchildren and they have quoted the cute sayings of these tykes. Not once have I asked for this punishment. And I have listened to some truly sparkling talk. This afternoon beside the pool I overheard two couples dabbling in the art of conversation. I made notes but I've decided against setting it all down in print — it would be taking up space with nothing. These people talked first, and at great length, about how well or how badly they sleep at night. One man mentioned rather daringly that he has reached the age where he has to get up once or twice in the night, and there were restrained titters all around. This same man said he always sleeps on his left side. Someone else, one of the ladies, put in that she sleeps on her right side. The other man said: "You take me. I start out sleepin' on my left side but after I get to sleep I don't know what happens, I spose I switch all around." Then the first man said he likes to get up in the night sometimes and go downstairs and raid the icebox. He likes cold fried chicken. I'll swear to God he said he likes cold fried chicken. This got them going on what they like to eat and how they like it cooked and somebody said, "Take me. I like baked beans but baked beans don't like me." He said it. On and on it went, and the marvelous thing about it was this: nobody listened to what the others had to say, nobody gave a good substantial god damn about the position in which the other fellow slept, or what he likes to eat. I have heard a million such conversations in my time, pointless, time-wasting and laced with idiocy. I say again that the human animal is most attractive when he is in the dentist's chair, his mouth wide open and full of machinery so that he can't speak a single word.

Yet I always listen, for I am an anthropologist who operates not among the savage peoples of the primitive islands, but among the savage peoples of the civilized climes. Today I was talking to a woman about women. I quoted a French critic who said: "To endow a woman with reason and thought is to put a sharp knife into the hands of a child." The lady, employing reason and thought, said: "So what? So what's wrong with that? You give the kid a sharp knife and he might take it out in the kitchen and peel the potatoes."

Later I heard a man in a deck chair say to another man: "She's an extremely neurotic girl, subject to frequent fainting spells. But it's a good thing, really — thats the only time she ever gets any sleep."

Among the crew and staff of the *Mariposa* are four or five married couples, working in separate departments of the ship, such as an assistant purser who is married to a waitress. At dinner tonight I saw the assistant purser start into the galley by way of the big revolving door, and suddenly he found himself in the presence of his pretty wife. He quickly kissed her. There was meaning in this act, for these married couples are strictly segregated while they are at sea, locked off from one another at night, unable to get at one another by day. I am told that one of the interesting sights during the cruise is that provided by these couples, when the ship docks, high-tailing it for the nearest hotels.

December 3

I WAS on deck at daybreak to see first Moorea and her fabled peaks and then the mountains of Tahiti. Captain Stone was on the bridge, lining up the range markers so the harbor pilot could take us through the pass in the reef. I caught a glimpse of the Captain, who has become my friend. I know that he is a competent man at his job but looking at him I can't help but think that the great navigation companies must hire their ship's captains because they look like ship's captains. I have never seen a skipper of an ocean liner who looked an inch less than he was supposed to look. Somewhere, I suppose, there is a runty and ugly little geezer with ill-fitting uniform who is in charge of a passenger liner, but I've never heard of him.

Here we were, moving through the famous pass, and my thoughts turned on a staff captain who once served on the *Mariposa* and who liked to drink. Much. They were talking about him last night in the bar. Late one night this man was looped in the quarters of another staff officer when he noticed a pair of water skis standing in a corner. With a fine display of authority he picked up the phone and called the bridge, identified himself as crisply as possible, and ordered the loving ship slowed down. "I'm gonna do some water-skiing off the stern," he said to the bridge. Not long after that he was dismissed. I don't think I would have fired him. A man with the impulse to water-ski in the dark, on the Pacific Ocean, behind the S. S. *Mariposa*, is a man who thinks big. Might go places.

Just after we edged through the pass Nelle came on deck and both of us were dismayed to see the water of the lagoon — it was brown and brackish-looking and there was trash littered over its surface. There before us lay the town of Papeete, with its white-and-red church spire and the Grand Hotel and the red French naval building and the yachts and fishing boats, but somehow the dirty water spoiled the picture. The mountains were obscured by clouds and mist and as we moved closer to shore the town looked dead, it being a Sunday morning. Then Jim Yonge came along and told us that there had been a big rainstorm and the rivers had poured mud and litter into the lagoon and that the water would clear in a day or so and be as beautiful as any water on earth, except maybe the lagoons of Bora Bora.

As soon as we were tied up, Ralph Varady, a fellow author and manager of the Hotel Tahiti, came on board to welcome us and joined us in the dining room for breakfast and talk. He is a big, virile-looking Dutchman who emigrated to America in the 1930s and became an American citizen. We rode with him out to the hotel which stands

beside the lagoon about a mile west of Papeete.

A "bungalow" was ready for us. In Tahiti a hotel bungalow is a one-story structure made of native materials, mostly bamboo and coconut wood and pandanus thatch for the roof. Our new home has a living room and bedroom and bath with shower. There are no more than half a dozen bathtubs on the whole island. We have a small refrigerator for ice cubes and fruit juices and beer. The furniture, made of native woods, is handsome and comfortable. There are tikis beside the doorway, a tiki being a Polynesian totem pole carved by a lecher with a vulgar knife.

The central part of the Hotel Tahiti is roomy, encompassing an area corresponding to the lobby, and then a big room which is the bar, and between the bar and the dining room a circular space for dancing, with a bandstand. This entire area is under one roof, or rather under a series of interlocking thatched roofs, all flowing together into one great establishment, with no walls — the guests can sit in the bar or the dance area or the dining room and look at the blue water of the lagoon and the white reef water and the peaks of Moorea a dozen miles away. This hotel is the social center of Tahiti, the biggest and best of the island, and it was built by Spencer Weaver, who owns a chain of restaurants in Hawaii. Mr. Weaver is known to the natives who work at his hotel as Mister God Damn, such being an expression he uses with feeling whenever he arrives to inspect his Tahitian property.

Considering that just about a year ago the hotel situation in Tahiti was truly miserable, the Hotel Tahiti is a place of elegance and charm, and the dining room would suit the taste of most fastidious travelers, of whom there are a Gods plenty. Tonight we sat down at a table for two to have dinner and in a moment a high, sweet voice sounded behind me, saying, "Oooooooooooooo-hoooooooooooo!" It was almost a bird call. Then it was repeated: "Oooooooooooooo-hoooooooooooo! Here I am! Hinano!" It was a tiny little native girl with snapping black eyes and glossy black hair. Hinano is a waitress and like her Honolulu boss she is dynamic, moving swiftly from kitchen to table, almost running, full of self-confidence and friendliness, and her trademark is that pleasant but unorthodox "Oooooooooooooo-hoooooooooooo!"

December 7

THERE IS a gap here of three days in which no entries appear in my journal. The gap is only on paper; I was not standing still. In fact I have been applying myself with great energy to the affairs of Papeete's waterfront. For me it has been much as it was for a friend of mine, a Georgia-born newspaperman, when he finally made it to Paris thirty years ago. "I got off the boat train and in a few minutes I was in the middle of the Champs," he said, pronouncing "Champs" as if it meant holders of boxing titles. "I bought a bottle of wine and drank it straight down. Then I went up to a Frenchman and said, Where's the whorehouse?" He shrugged and walked away. Then the Head Fairy of all Paris came up to me and took hold of my arm and started to lead me off to his den. I belted him to the pavement. Gendarmes came at me from all directions, screeching at me in French. I yelled back at them, 'Talk English, you frog bastards!' Fifteen minutes after I hit the Champs I was on my way to jail."

I quickly discovered that the hub of Tahitian life is an *etablissement* known as Bar Vaima (Va-ee-mah). The Papeete waterfront is a crescent covering just a few blocks. For my purposes it extends from the naval building on the west, with a small French warship parked out front and a bust of the French "discoverer" Bougainville mounted on a pedestal nearby, eastward to the area of Aline's department store, which stands beside one of the town's chief boozing and hula resorts, Au Col Bleu. In the center of this crescent facing the harbor, its wide open front flush to the sidewalk, is Bar Vaima. Between the sidewalk and the street pavement is a small area with six or eight tables placed beneath a couple of acacias. This is Tahiti's sidewalk cafe. The people of the island come and go along the sidewalk, for Vaima is the focal point of all activity, the meeting place, and they come and go too along the pavement, by bicycle and scooter and toy-sized automobile and occasional limousine. And beyond the pavement, no more than fifty feet away, are the boats tied up along the quay — the dumpy boats that ply between Papeete and Moorea, the fishing boats, the schooners that haul copra and pigs and vomiting passengers from the atolls. This is the area, too, where the private yachts tie up with their wondrous and fantastic people. In the last couple of days I have seen no less than half a dozen young men off the yachts who looked as if they were auditioning for the role of Christ in a passion play.

This is the part of Tahiti I think I'm going to enjoy the most and, though I have been spending many hours sitting at Bar Vaima, the whole picture is a bit fuzzy, like a movie montage. I remember falling in with three young men from the engine room of an American tanker.

They were clean-cut, good-looking boys, dressed in stylish sports clothes, as handsome as any young men from the Westchester hilltops. But their looks were deceptive. They were girl-hunters and fight-seekers. They kept saying they were after something called poon. I went ranging around the waterfront with them, feeling young, wanting to get in on the fighting and the poon, and they were most friendly toward me and welcomed me into their company. They asked me if there was anybody I wanted cold-cocked, and I said not yet. But they insisted that I stay out of their fist fights. They didn't say so, but they made it dear that I am not supple enough for this sort of shore-leave activity. There was one good free-for-all in a dark alley, but the details are not clear. I can't understand how certain people can remember things. There is a story about an Australian member of Alcoholics Anonymous who got up to testify at a meeting and said: "I have had a very interesting and exciting life, every day of it. I'd like to write my life story, but I can't remember it."

Tahiti has but a single road that could properly be called a highway. It is a great circle traveling completely around the island, and it is known as the Broom Road. It passes through the middle of Papeete, where it has about four different names. One small stretch is named for De Gaulle. The Latin peoples always seem to have more street names than they have streets. Here in Tahiti portions of the streets are given names of World War battles in which Tahitians participated, such as the ugly-sounding Quai Bir-Hackeim which is part of the waterfront street, or of Frenchmen thought to have been heroes, or of politicians suspected of having had moments of honesty; from time to time these names are changed as new heroes and new politicians supplant the old.

For purposes of clarity I am going to call the waterfront street the waterfront, and the Broom Road shall be the Broom Road even in that westerly stretch where it is officially Rue du Commandant Destremeau. It has been called the Broom Road, after a tropical weed that grew along its borders, since the time of the English missionaries. In Papeete it is the most heavily traveled thoroughfare and is almost always swarming with bikes and automobiles. In the heart of the town it passes the Vital Triangle — the place where the three most important institutions stand together: the Catholic cathedral, the Banque de L'Indochine, and the Hinano brewery. It is said that the brewery is Tahiti's largest single industry, producing over five million bottles of beer each year.

What I have seen thus far of the famed Tahitian girls has not been too soul-shaking. I have not yet felt my toes curling tightly in my shoes. The brown-skinned ladies who serve coffee and beer and booze at Bar Vaima and the girls who hang around the place are far from

beautiful. And it is sadly true about the teeth. Almost all of them have bad teeth, or no teeth at all, or plates. And from having gone barefooted all their lives they have big and ugly feet, with splayed toes and thickly calloused soles, and their legs are often covered with sores. Most of them have Negroid features, with thick lips and flattened noses. Their one great asset (over and above their philosophy of life) is their skin. They have, by reputation, the smoothest, most satiny skin in the whole wide world. It is true. I have touched it. I have touched it several times already because I have had intercourse with some of them at Bar Vaima. Social intercourse. Not one of the girls has objected when I touched her, here and there, for the purpose of feeling the cool velvety skin. I spent an hour with one native girl who came to my sidewalk table and she said she would accept some gin if I wanted to buy it for her. She told me that she has a steady boy friend and that he has a wonderful "out-board moty." I didn't ask her what he uses it for. She said that her boy friend has no objection if she takes American tourists to bed in her grandmother's little hotel, which she told me was nearby. Her boy friend, she assured me, likes American tourists. I asked her if she hangs around Quinn's, the most celebrated saloon in the South Pacific, which is two blocks up the street. She said not often, that Quinn's is just a "cut-it-out place" for tourists. I think she means a "cut-up place." From what I've heard of Quinn's, nobody there ever uses the phrase cut-it-out.

December 8

IT IS time that I undertake what is known in films as an establishing shot — a method of setting the scene. Tahiti is a remarkable island topographically with an area of 402 square miles. I refuse to drag Rhode Island in at this point, but I can say that the city of Los Angeles is bigger, with an area of 458 square miles. Fred Beck tells me that Los Angeles has plans for becoming even bigger by annexing Catalina Island, a place called California City, and a place called Gold Beach, Oregon. There are really two islands, Big Tahiti and Little Tahiti, and together they form an upside-down figure eight and they are joined by a slender isthmus, which is at the far side of Big Tahiti. We writers, when we speak of Tahiti, we usually mean Big Tahiti, for there isn't much on Little Tahiti but wild mountainous country and a few tiny native villages which see very few travelers.

The one big single fact about Tahiti which is not known to the generality of the tourists is that of the towering mountains. Mount Orohena here on Big Tahiti is 7339 feet high and members of a local mountaineering club didn't succeed in scaling it until ten years ago. Most of the mountainous interior of Tahiti has never been seen by man. The island is like a big hat with a narrow brim. The people live in the narrow strip between the mountains and the sea.

Here in Paradise the beaches are miserable, for the most part, and dangerous, and the better hotels build concrete piers extending beyond the coral shelf so that their guests can swim in comfort; diving and swimming off these piers is actually great sport, but beach addicts are in for disappointment. The black sand beaches are supposed to be the best, but most Americans simply can't adapt themselves to the color of the volcanic sand — they say they can't avoid the feeling that it's dirty. It isn't — it's as clean and fine as the white sand beaches of Long Island.

There are close to forty thousand permanent inhabitants of the island and of these about two hundred are Americans. Tahitians and half castes make up the bulk of the population, with about five thousand Chinese and five thousand French. The Chinese are the storekeepers and the reason they are in Tahiti is that many years ago in the United States we had a bloody war — a story I'll get to eventually. Most of the French residents are government employees, called (with considerable contempt) *fonctionnaires*. Many of them have no affinity for the tropics and the primitive behaviorism of the natives. I have been told that quite a few *fonctionnaires* are here against their personal wishes, having been shipped out because someone back home wanted to get rid of them. In other words,

Paradise Island is a Siberia for French *fonctionnaires*. They come to Tahiti in ever-increasing numbers and jobs have to be created for them, which means that new bureaus are set up and the whole goddam thing is a beautiful mess. Government is an art. Government is a science.

I have been reading a book written by an Englishman named George Calderon, who was here in 1906, shortly before my birth. He summarized the Tahiti of his day as follows:

The Europeans and Americans have introduced coffee, manioc, vanilla, oxen, goats, mice, mosquitoes, fleas, bicycles, sewing machines, telephones, ice-works, concertinas, cotton frocks, corrugated iron, Christianity, Mormonism, Munyon's remedies, mouth-organs, milk shakes, tuberculosis, syphilis and other amenities, which have flourished exceedingly in the virgin soil and caused a number of modifications in the life of the natives, amenities known collectively as Civilization.

All of those things are still very much present today, with the possible exception of Munyons remedies. Dr. Munyon was an American benefactor who made a great fortune selling a kidney cure which was given to him by Divine Providence. Seems a pity its no longer available.

December 9

WE ARE learning that things change with great rapidity in the Tahiti of today. Old landmarks disappear and new buildings rise in their place. People who settled here and made a strong impression on the community have sold out and departed, and new people have taken their places. A year ago there were no more than two or three passable hotels. Today there are eight or ten and more going up in a hurry.

A writer comes here and gathers material for a magazine article and a couple of months elapse before it appears in print. In that brief time so many changes occur that almost half the things he described may no longer be true. Marion Gough of *House Beautiful*, who had recently written a sprightly article about her visit to Tahiti, had lunch with us in New York just before we felt. She told us many things about the island and she cautioned Nelle against appearing on the streets in shorts. The men of Tahiti, she said, and especially the important men of Tahiti, do not like it when the women wear shorts or slacks in public. This attitude is true among many American men back home — I have heard some of them speak with great feeling about the matter. They are dead wrong. They are illogical and impractical. Their complaint is based on a pudgy, lardy, blubbery state of affairs, which is the exact reason why women should be compelled by law to wear slacks and shorts in public; we men are entitled to know what conditions actually prevail back there. And so I am pleased to be able to report that the custom has changed since Marion Gough was here. The girls and women wear shorts and slacks in public and some of them wear skin-tight Capri pants. In many cases, glory be.

I managed to get in a couple of hours of loafing at Bar Vaima today. Three different Tahitian girls asked me if I would care to go with them to a little hotel close by, run by their grandmothers. I don't want anybody to think that I am a dedicated celibate, but these particular girls would require a lot of bothersome preliminaries — and I am not speaking of love play. I am speaking of a month or so at the dentist, plus some of those old-time World War I wraparound leggings to hide both their legs and feet.

December 10

I HAVE accumulated a list of unpleasant things that are to be met with in Tahiti and I might as well set them down here and then try to forget them. Those lovely coral reefs girding the island are the habitat of horror. There are moray eels ten feet long lurking in crevices, and they will fasten their fangs into you, quite irrevocably, if you get too near them. I have seen movies of these monsters and I do believe I'd rather take my chances with a hammerhead shark or a rich widow from Pasadena. It doesn't help to know that in the moray eel, both pairs of nostrils are barbellate. The octopus also thrives in these waters and sometimes has a reach of fourteen feet and, I presume, is willing to exercise it on people who come his way. There are certain kinds of fish that eat poisonous coral growth and if you in turn eat those fish you will die in agony. The natives know what to do about this. If they are at all suspicious about a fish they have caught, they cut it open and lay it out in the sun and if the flies go to work on it, then it is good to eat and they eat it.

One of the most inconsiderate creatures functioning in these waters is the *nohu*, or stonefish. He is about a foot long, with dorsal spines rising two inches out of his back. If you step on him those spikes will inject poison into your foot — a poison quite similar to rattlesnake venom. This *nohu* has the camouflaging capabilities of the chameleon. He stations himself beside a coral wall, blending into the background, and holds perfectly still with his mouth wide open. Along come some unsuspecting little fish and when they see that hole, they think it's a real interesting opening in the reef, leading perhaps to unknown splendors, and they go swimming in. What a dirty bastard that *nohu* is. But let us remember that there are things that are wrong, flaws and drawbacks, in every place we may go and we must learn to accept them and live with them. It has been written that there is no humor in heaven, and no sex life there. *Nohus* and moray eels are not so bad.

And now we come to the matter of insects. We were warned that Tahiti is a paradise for bugs as well as for people. We have already been made aware of it. Our bungalow is screened but the mosquitoes are present in force and we find huge spiders around the place — usually they crawl into the wash basin in the bathroom. In the olden time the Tahitians considered spiders to be shadows of the gods and held them in esteem. To them, also, the cricket was a powerful religious symbol. When a Tahitian priest saw enemy warriors approaching he would yell out, "I am a cricket!" and the enemy warriors would drop their rocks and throw down

their sharpened jawbones and take to heel. The Tahitians have always been fully as superstitious as Americans. And some of their superstitions can be most confusing. I have read about how a merman god came ashore at Papara and the Tahitians asked him to introduce himself and he said, "I am a god of extensive mitigation." If he had said it to me, I would have found it necessary to inquire: "Am I allowed to ask for an explanation of that remark, your honor?"

It is too early for me to catalogue the Tahitian insects by species. The ants are very small, but they make up in numbers what they lack in muscle. The termites are at work in every structure, chewing away at the woodwork and building homes in the furniture. They don't disturb anyone. People just shrug and sweep up the sawdust. We know quite well that the cockroach abounds and prospers here. But as we meet all these creatures we try to be tolerant of them. We were urged toward this bug tolerance by our friend Desmond Slattery before we left home.

Desmond Slattery is a former movie actor, one of a fading breed, a gentleman adventurer, a buccaneer in commercial matters and a man with a lot of knowledge of the insect world. He came to our home shortly before our departure and we talked of the South Seas, where he once roamed in the merchant marine. We told him of our uneasiness about the bugs of Tahiti and he stood before the fireplace, a glass of strong spirits in his hand, and gave us a stern lecture. I took notes on what he said and present here a summary:

There is only one thing for you to do. You must learn about insects, for with knowledge comes tolerance and with tolerance comes understanding and out of understanding comes appreciation, and appreciation leads to admiration. You can teach yourself to love bugs. Unless you are some kind of a clod.

There were trillions of insects before there were men on earth and the fact is the insects took care of the monsters of prehistoric times, making it possible for man to develop without being eaten up by dinosaurs and such. You are a transgressor, a trespasser, in a world that belongs in justice to the insects, the same as America belongs in justice to the Indians.

When you get to Tahiti, make your peace with those insects, learn to love them, for love will bring respect. That is all that love really is. [In addition to being an authority on bugs, Desmond is an authority on love.]

Take along a magnifying glass and study them, count their legs, inspect their coloring, examine their remarkable eyes. The eyes are the window of the soul: look into the eyes of the insect

and you will see exactly what he has going for him. And as you examine *him*, put yourself in *his* position. He is probably looking straight up your nose holes. What do you suppose *he* thinks about *you*? What are *his* feelings about the human race?

Crickets and cockroaches are of the same order, like the Irish and the Scotch. These two cousins have been on our planet, I mean their planet, for two hundred and eighty million years. They like it here and they are going to stay and you can't do anything about it. They will eat their share, no matter who plants it.

In his long history the cockroach has never done mankind a dirty turn. Yet he is hated. Study his history. He has much greater dignity than man. Learn about him and respect him instead of stomping on him.

Now, about the mosquitoes and the ants. People wonder if there is any reason why God should have created these two. Of course there is a reason. Mosquitoes were created to feed bullfrogs. Ants were created to feed ant-eaters. There is purpose in all of Nature and it is beautiful and inspiring. There has always been a worldwide shortage of man-eaters, and there are many areas that have no bullfrogs. So, if such shortages exist on the island of Tahiti, and there are no bullfrogs and no ant-eaters, then I think you should feel free to wallop those sons-of-bitching mosquitoes and to stomp those mother-loving ants. For this you have the permission and the blessing of a recognized friend of the insects. Annihilate the bastards.

I sometimes think that I am favored above other men in having such noble and scholarly and understanding friends as Desmond Slattery. Having finished his lecture he replenished his drink and we sat around talking about other things, and he remembered back twenty years to the time he was aboard a ship in the South Pacific and the vessel was overrun with cockroaches. At that time Desmond had not learned to understand and admire these creatures, nor had his shipmates. Their freighter was anchored off one of the South Sea islands, the crew had run out of booze, and none was to be had on shore. Then along came an Italian ship and anchored alongside the Americans. The Americans asked the Italians how things were going and the Italians said fierce, and they had a plague of bedbugs on board and everybody was about to go nuts. A fast-thinking Swede on Desmond's vessel called across to the Italians that the natural enemy of the bedbug is the cockroach, that cockroaches will clean up a bedbug situation in jig time; the Swede added that there were

plenty of cockroaches on his ship, and that he and his mates would be willing to swap a supply of cockroaches for a supply of wine. Agreed. So the Swede and Desmond and the others went scurrying below decks, gathering cockroaches, and they passed a gunny sack half full of them across to the Italians, who in turn sent over two casks of wine. I asked Desmond if cockroaches really devour bedbugs. He gave me a forthright answer. Of course not. Bedbugs, he said, have their uses in the world but never as a foodstuff.

December 11

ON THE recommendation of everybody I have gone to Etablissement Dave Cave and rented a white Renault Dauphine. This would almost appear to be Tahiti's official car. The streets and highways abound in Dauphines and Dave Cave has a big corral full of them. He is a former Californian, a large, dark, handsome man, one of the most popular figures in the island. He produced one of the Dauphines for me and I took it out in the country so I could get accustomed to it, especially to shifting gears, and drove the rocky road to King Pomare's Tomb. I was so fascinated by the little car that I didn't even look at the tomb.

We have escaped from the tyranny of news. Here in Tahiti there is a small daily newspaper, printed in French, and neither of us can speak or read French so it is of little use to us. I have noticed that it carries no news at all from the United States, save for an occasional item datelined *United Nations*. All foreign dispatches are from Paris or Algiers; the rest of the world doesn't exist. And the Tahitian news consists largely of traffic accidents. We don't really miss our daily ration of news, which we get at home by radio, television and newspaper. There is one American here who has such a craving for newspapers that he goes down to the ships that come in from the States and scrounges around, picking up papers that are from ten days to a month old. I suspect that he is addicted to some specific feature of the daily press, such as soccer scores or the comic strips. More likely the latter.

We dined tonight at an outlying hotel and the menu featured "young local duckling in orange sauce." This is a dish I have prepared myself at home, and so I gave it a try. It was the toughest piece of meat I have ever encountered in my entire life. Magellan's men who ate the oxhide chafing gear off the ship's yards couldn't have made it with that duck. I had Nelle give it a try with *her* knife, and she said it was altogether beyond belief. We discussed it as a natural phenomenon and decided it would be impossible for mankind to deliberately breed up a duck of this consistency. There had to be some other answer. Back at the Hotel Tahiti I spoke to one of the Tahitian boys about it and he gave me the answer in broken English. He said that sometimes the restaurant owners send runners out to scout for ducks along the 120 miles of the Broom Road. These boys go out at daybreak, seeking ducks that have been killed on the highway during the night. Such ducks, said the young man, frequent the edges of the highway and walk on the pavement itself, for they enjoy the feel of the macadam underfoot. Most of them escape from

being killed by Dauphines by learning to run at great speeds. Thus they have developed into a breed of road-runner duck, lean and strong with powerful muscles. It was just such a duck that was served up to me at the other hotel.

The way I manage my daily journal is to carry a small pad of paper with me wherever I go, jotting down things so I won't forget them, and each evening I transfer these bits of wisdom and island lore into a stenographers wire-bound notebook. Tonight I found, in a shirt pocket, a slip of paper on which I had written: *Spell spelled backwards is lleps, pronounced in Spanish, yeps.* Just thought you might like to know how a man of many talents operates.

December 12

THIS MORNING I asked the young man at the desk what day of the month it was. His eyes widened and he stared at me a long moment, then repeated my question. He said that nobody had ever asked him that before. So far as he knew, nobody else had ever been interested in the day of the month. He tried to think of the answer, but couldn't, and so he went backstage somewhere and finally came out and said it was the twelfth.

This young man is one of several native Tahitian boys who run the hotel desk and they are not glib in the English tongue. They can speak Tahitian and French and pidgin and some Chinese, but English is difficult for them. I find myself frequently painting myself into corners when I try to communicate with them. A few days ago I asked one of them if he had an envelope large enough to hold a manuscript. He listened carefully, with scrutability, then stepped back of the mail rack and brought me an umbrella.

I have neglected to mention a most important fact of life in Tahiti — the absence of all tipping. On ships, on planes, in all tourist offices the traveler is told over and over again that tipping is tabu in Tahiti. Local people beg him not to forget himself and tip taxi driver or waitress or chambermaid or anybody else. It is a difficult thing to keep in mind. I have been handing out tips all my life and not to do so now seems to be morally wrong. I can't avoid feeling that the cab driver and the waitress resent me, even hate me, and consider me to be a cheap jerk. But I am playing the game because it is the sporting thing to do. There are moments when, unthinkingly, my hand starts for my pocket, but thus far I haven't given out a penny in tips. Now and then some tourist character comes along and begins throwing the bills around to the help, but everyone despises him and shuns him and wishes him in hell. I have heard that when Israel first got started the no-tipping rule was inaugurated, and it worked beautifully for a while, but by now, in the 1960s, the steady flow of moneyed tourists has made tipping almost as normal a practice as it is in New York. It'll happen here eventually.

The rule of no-tipping is not, as some people seem to think, a manifestation of good will toward the traveler. Pure selfishness stands behind it — the selfishness of local people in the no-tipping country. They do not want tourists to tip taxi drivers because taxi drivers will then expect tips from *them*. Tipping by tourists means that the cost of living goes up for the local residents. I have seen this work in Mexico, where at one time there was an earnest effort to eliminate all tipping.

It didn't work, and now the Mexican people are trying to convince

tourists that small tips are the best. The last time I was in Mexico City someone gave me a small guidebook written and published by Mexicans in clumsy and sometimes comical English. This booklet warned tourists that if they ever tipped a driver more than fifty centavos (four cents) he would be angry and unhappy, for he never anticipates more than that. I understand what was in the mind of the Mexican who wrote that bit of foolishness. It is a fact that a cruising cab driver in Mexico City will pass up Mexicans who are trying to get a taxi and go on in quest of tourists, who almost always tip handsomely. But I also know that if I ever tipped a taxi driver fifty centavos, it would not surprise me if he picked up a sharp machete and whacked off both my ears.

I was sitting with Ralph Varady in the bar tonight and his dog, Bombo, a fixture of the Hotel Tahiti, came along and began sniffing around my feet, as he has done several times before. Said Ralph: "Those sandals must be made of buffalo hide." I said yes. "Bombo likes the smell of buffalo," he said. "All dogs like it. People who have buffalo-hide sandals and leave them outside their doors or on the pier while they're in swimming stand a good chance of having a dog come along and carry them away."

Just another hazard of life in Paradise.

December 13

NELLE HAS met a young man named Dick Frost who is boss of the local Standard Oil operation. Today Mr. Frost took us for a drive down the west shore, through the popular residential district of Punaauia (Poon-ah'-wee-uh). During the ride he spoke feelingly of the natives and their aversion to work. He said they shirk, soldier, fake, goldbrick and malingers. They violate every known rule for getting ahead in the world, and achieve nothing by it — nothing but a profound though childish happiness. I suggested that perhaps Mr. Frost was unhappy in Tahiti and ready to go back to the States. Not at all, he said. Both he and his wife love it here and will be truly saddened when the time comes for them to leave. He just happens to believe strongly in Work.

We have become acquainted with a slim and pretty young French girl named Genevieve, who has the title of hostess at the Hotel Tahiti. She goes to the airport and welcomes guests, and boards the big ships and greets the hotel's customers, but most of the time she's around the lobby and the bar and the dining room, making herself available for people who have problems. She comes of a good family in Paris and is of an adventuresome nature. She spent six months in London perfecting the English she had acquired in school, and then she set out on a great journey. It was her plan to travel all around the world, stopping in exciting and exotic places and working for a while to meet expenses as well as to get acquainted with all types of people. She reached Tahiti a year ago, planning on staying two or three months. Now she thinks she may never leave the island, save for an occasional trip back to visit her family. She rides a motor bike, like most people, and loves it. She said that in France the school kids know about Tahiti and attach a romantic significance to it but they never say, "Some day I'll just drop everything and go out to Tahiti," because it is so far from France that it has always seemed unattainable, unreachable. I got into a warm argument with Genevieve about the bike riders of Papeete, it being my contention that a white line should be painted on either side of the roadway and the cyclists required to stay outside of that line. If they crossed it and were brought to earth by a Dauphine, then it would be their own fault. Genevieve was horrified. "Never in Tahiti!" she cried. "This is part of the beauty of Tahiti — that I am not required to do anything by rules. I do not have to come to work on time. It would be awful to have rules the same as in other countries." I suggested that the rules about not parking in the middle of the road were sensible, and that there was some logic in the rules which say no purse-snatching and

no murdering, but she was stubborn and stuck out her little lip the way Chevalier does it and said thank God nobody pays any attention to such rules in Tahiti, and if there's one thing about a woman I don't like it's womanly stubbornness and so I said with some asperity, "Okay, go get your damnfool self splattered all over the highway."

The conduct of the employees around the hotel, around every hotel, is contrary to all the rules we know in America, including the business of arriving at work on time. The Tahitians and the Chinese and the half-castes who work at the Hotel Tahiti put in about ten hours a day. By this I mean that they are present about ten hours. They work about five. They enjoy being around the handsome establishment but they don't want to be slugging away at their jobs continually. They prefer to stop and sit down and have a smoke and have some beer and talk to one another and perhaps sing a little. Their coffee breaks may last an hour or two. It is expected from them, and management doesn't put up a holler, for it would do management no good. The natives would simply walk away and never come back. The thing that's really radical about their behavior during these rest periods is that they do their relaxing in the bar or at the circle of tables around the dance floor, right in the middle of the hotel. Just today a Chinese workman, possibly a plumber, went to the bar and ordered a bottle of beer and took it to a table where hotel guests normally sit. Along came another Chinese workman — both of them were in rough clothes — and raised his hand to the beer-drinker, and went along to the bar and got himself some beer and joined the other. Back toward the rear of the bar were half a dozen employees sitting around a table, drinking beer, and two of them had their guitars and were playing and singing, pleasantly and not too loud. This sort of thing goes on from midmorning to late at night and nobody has any objection. I was watching the musical group when along came one of the waiter captains, a young man with waves in his blond hair and girlish mannerisms. He stopped at the table and there was some talk and then the guitar music grew louder and faster and a barmaid got up and she and the waiter captain went into a violent Tahitian interpretation of *Le Twist*.

The books say right when they say that in Tahiti the democratic spirit is strong. Nobody here is better than anybody else.

December 15

WE HAVE been seeing The Congressman and his charming wife almost every day. They are spending their vacation in a lovely house a couple of miles east of Papeete on the Broom Road. Yesterday we took the standard trip around the island with them in *their* Dauphine. Among other things we stopped to visit with Ansa Japy, a blonde Swedish woman who never stops talking and who has vigorous and unyielding opinions on every subject touched upon in the *Britannica*. She is the wife of Andre Japy, who made international headlines years ago with a flight from Paris to Japan and who is so people-shy that he has become a sort of airborne Simeon Stylites. M. Japy was not at home when we arrived. The moment he hears that visitors are coming he hops in his car and races over to Little Tahiti where he has a working farm and a private airstrip, gets into his plane and spends a few hours buzzing over the island. His wife, however, is a lively one and there is no lack of talk in the Japy household when the master is aloft. The house is one of the most charming in Tahiti and stands facing Little Tahiti across an important stretch of water. This bay was chosen by the original white settlers to be the main harbor of Tahiti, but the idea was abandoned because of the frequency of the rainstorms in the district. Still, the setting is beautiful and the English-style house a jewel. It was built by Robert Keable, an English writer, in the 1920s. Keable was an Anglican minister who revolted violently against the church and everything it stood for. His novel *Simon Called Peter* was a sensation in 1921 both in Europe and America. Keable lived and wrote in this house and died here and is buried in the Papeete cemetery.

We had lunch at Faratea Restaurant, beside the sea near the Isthmus of Taravao which connects the two islands of Tahiti and then we drove home by the eastern shore, which is less populated than the west coast and which, because of its rocky shoreline and its incredible valleys and waterfalls, is the most beautiful part of Tahiti.

The Congressman has been, in a sense, a keen disappointment to me. My teachers — the writers I have most respected in my life — from Mark Twain to Henry Mencken, have instilled in me the firm belief that no respectable man would ever become a member of Congress and that, in fact, the term itself is a synonym for an oaf and a scoundrel. This man, this new friend of mine, is intelligent and witty and a gentleman. There are sports and mutations in every form of human life.

The Dauphine has been giving me some difficulty. I'll never forget my first trip along the busy waterfront street. I started at the eastern

end, near the church of the Splinter Mormons, and as I moved along that street, which seemed now to be miles in length, the Dauphine stalled and coughed and jerked and shuddered, sometimes bucking like a Cheyenne bronc. I felt that the entire population was present and watching and probably saying, "This is the most marvelous passage since the transit of Venus across the face of the sun brought Captain Cook to the island." After the first day I was thinking about handing the car back to Dave Cave and riding taxis. But the day following that I made a decision. I analyzed myself and concluded that I was bashful in the presence of that toy automobile, frightened of it. I went back to my theory on cracking an egg: you've got to let the egg know that you are its master, you've got to crack it with authority and towering self-confidence, else you will dribble goo all over the kitchen. It is much the same as the electric-eye doors at the entrance to the supermarkets back home; most people approach those doors warily, hesitantly, not feeling sure about them at all, but there is one guy, a radio commentator from WOR, who is famous for being sure of himself, who strides up to those doors without faltering, with the air of a man who knows that if the mechanism fails, God will swing them open for him. And so, with these things in mind, I got into that Dauphine and grat my teeth and rammed her into first and jabbed the accelerator and then, wham into second, and boom into third, and I roared away as if I were leaving the pits at Indianapolis, and I had her licked.

Now I am beginning to have jerk trouble again, and this is bad in the traffic of Papeete where the bikes and the scooters are fifty to one against the automobiles. The fault seemed to be in the accelerator pedal, which was sticking and needed lubrication. So I brought the car to the hotel entrance and asked the boy on the desk if there was an oilcan around the place, making a gesture as if pumping an oilcan with my thumb (try it — it looks real crazy). When I finally got through to him he spoke to another boy in Tahitian French, telling him to go find some weel de mackinaw, and after much chasing around the premises they came up with a can. I went out and placed myself in an upside-down posture on the front seat, my legs in the air and my head and shoulders under the dashboard, and as I oiled the pedal a crowd of natives gathered to watch. I put on the air of a master mechanic, twisting about and sighting at the pedal with one eye, then the other, going hm-m-m-m-m and using my hand to work the mechanism back and forth. The natives were really impressed and when I emerged from the car a couple of them slapped me on the back in admiration. "Iaorana!" they said, which translates roughly: "Man, you sure know how to handle an oilcan!"

At dinner tonight I overheard a conversation between two

American ladies who were seated at adjoining tables. They had been exchanging pleasantries, and then . . .

First Lady: "If this purse of mine looks pretty fat, its because I've got it loaded with those wonderful vanilla beans. We're leaving for home tonight and you know you're not supposed to take them back. This way I can get past the inspectors."

Second Lady: "My! How clever of you! I think I'll have to try that."

Both ladies were of the type who live in proper neighborhoods and spend a lot of time at club meetings where they pass resolutions against bad government.

December 16

I WAS feeling sickish this morning and when Nelle heard that the hotel's doctor-on-call was on the premises I had him stop by and give me some pills and a shot in the pants. When he walked in I could scarcely believe my eyes. He was a young man with the slim build of a teenager and a dark complexion — as handsome as a movie actor. He had on a sports shirt of conservative hue, a pair of tailored slacks and a pair of go-aheads (which are almost the universal footgear in Tahiti). Behind him came a beautiful girl in simple, revealing Tahitian attire. I judged her to be part Polynesian and part Chinese. She was carrying the doctor's bag and she handed things to him and loaded the needle at his command. He spoke quite good English with a strong Charles Boyer accent and after he had departed Nelle said it should be a penitentiary offense for a man to be that good-looking. We learned later that this opinion of him is embraced by every woman in the South Seas.

Tonight we dined with The Congressman and his charming wife and then decided we would do Quinn's. The Congressman said that he is an old hand at the business of doing Quinn's and that he would take charge, as a sort of guide.

And so we walked along the waterfront and pushed through the swinging doors and into the somewhat dingy dance hall. The Congressman was leading the way, talking about how he knew Quinn's of old (he was here last year) and all of a sudden they hit him, the savage-looking girls wearing pareus and the floral crowns called *couronnes*. We were alongside the bandstand when those girls closed in, working swiftly, hurling leis around our necks and slapping *couronnes* upon our heads, and before The Congressman, old hand at the game, could draw his breath and utter a protest, the head *vahine* sang out, "Wahn hundreh sixty franc!" And he was stuck.

My recollection of that night in Quinn's is of noise — noisy music and forty or fifty noisy conversations, plus girlish laughter from girls as well as from a half dozen socialized faggots. At one point I glanced around looking for a sign to indicate rest rooms, for I wanted to rest, and there were none and I figured out that the place might be concealed back of a curtained doorway at the rear of the room. I walked over to it and found no sign of any kind but I could hear running water and a drunk in a nearby booth thumbed me in. I parted the curtains and found myself in a dimly lighted square room, maybe twelve by twelve, with wooden slats on the floor and these slats covered with heavy wire fencing material. Water was flowing down one wall and standing in the center of the room was a handsome

native girl, tall and shapely with regular features. She was fiddling with her floral crown, which seemed to be coming apart. I was startled to find her there but she merely gave me a quick glance and went on with her work. I thought, well, this may be a mistake but I've made many a mistake before, so here goes. I marched boldly up to the waterfall and continued with the aims of my expedition. When I turned around she was gone. I have reported on this adventure in toiletry because it is common to the bars and dance halls of Tahiti. Male and female and *mahu* can go together into that one room and do anything they want to, including sing along with Mitch.

The fairies at Quinn's were beyond Betelgeuse, far, far out. I searched the crowd but didn't catch sight of the one a California friend told me to look for — an outgoing fag who frequents the waterfront and sprays new acquaintances with perfume before kissing them on both cheeks. (Of the face.) He-she carries a kit of assorted perfumes and an atomizer, and always selects the scent to fit the personality of the party to be saluted.

Quinn's stands with its bamboo front and its high carved tikis facing the harbor, a saloon whose fame has spread over the entire South Pacific. But I must report in some sadness that it is no longer *tres elegant* to go there unless you are a seaman off a hell-ship. Some of the new hotels have dance music in the evenings and have taken the play away from Quinn's, where even the French Governor could sometimes be seen dancing with his Tahitian cook. In spite of this decline, the natives still feel that an American tourist knows but one landmark in Papeete. Ask them how to get to the post office and they respond, "Well, you know where is Quinn's . . ." Inquire of them how to go about getting to New Zealand and they will begin, "Well, you start at Quinn's and you . . ."

It is the starting-place for all other places.

December 16

I HAVE made the acquaintance of another French doctor. His name is Jean Lambert Tallien and I met him when he stopped to speak to a friend on the sidewalk at Bar Vaima. He is small and slightly plump and has a white Vandyke beard and a black ribbon attached to his glasses. Someone whispered to me that he is in semi-retirement, that he is full of wisdom and that he has a vast knowledge and skill in the practice of medicine. Having been introduced to him, I called upon him today in his home not far from the hospital.

He has been in Tahiti only fifteen years, the great days of his success in medicine having been in Paris. We talked of these things for a while and then I came to the point.

"Doctor," I said, "I am approaching the age of fifty-four and I am able to foresee, in the normal course of events, that there will come a slackening-off in my, well, in my . . . uh . . ."

"Sexual activity," he put in helpfully.

"Yes," I said. "I can foresee it. I am foresighted about such things. Some men don't concern themselves with the future, but I do. Now, you understand, doctor, it hasn't happened yet. Oh, no. I'm a mere fifty-three, going on fifty-four, and I don't need a bit of, well, a bit of assistance right now, hell, I'm as . . . but the time may come when . . ."

"I understand," said Old Doctor Tallien. "And I know exactly what is to be done in such circumstances. Now, what you need is ... I mean, what you'll likely need in the future, well, let me put it this way — let us discuss the precise nature of any difficulty that may arise in the future, as you grow older."

We discussed the precise nature of such future difficulties, and I must confess that it was difficult for me to talk about such difficulties.

"There are many things that can be done in these matters," said Old Doctor Tallien. "This is a situation that becomes most important to the men of my country, and so I know much about. Give me a moment."

Old Doctor Tallien, *good* Old Doctor Tallien, now took a pad and began writing prescriptive hieroglyphics on it and then he handed it to me.

"Now," he said, "if the time ever comes when you think you might need these two medications, take this paper to the pharmacist and follow the directions I have written on it. He will give you back the paper. And you must promise me that you will not tell other men what I have done for you. I don't want them coming down on me in droves. And don't give any of them the prescription."

I promised, and left his house, and since I didn't have anything else to do, I went straight to the glistening new pharmacy which occupies a corner near Quinn's. I trotted part of the way. And I thought, why wait till I get old and decrepit and maybe in a wheel chair and beyond help? I'll just get this stuff right now and have it available if it ever happens to me.

The pharmacist was a man wearing a crisp white knee-length jacket of the type used by imitation doctors in the television commercials about livers and kidneys. I handed him the paper and he turned around and walked away and I saw that under the neat jacket he wore blue jeans and had on go-aheads. He went inside and came back with some boxes and gave them to me and gave me back the paper. In France and in Tahiti you do not have to surrender your prescription to the pharmacist. You retain it and use it as often as you like. I was happy to learn this.

So I carried my medicines back to the hotel and sat and looked at them a while and then said, what the hell, this is a very interesting proposition, it won't *hurt* me to give them a try, I've got the paper and I can get more if the time ever comes *in my old age* when I really need them. And so I opened the boxes. One contained glass ampules, or *ampoules buvables*. These are glass cylinders or cartridges about three and a half inches long, containing a black liquid, and the cylinders are micronated, or brought to a long glass point at either end. Loaded with the black stuff, they have the look of a lethal weapon. The directions on the box were in French and I couldn't make them out so I went to the bar to find out how to get the medicine out of the cartridges. I don't want it to appear that I was *eager* to get at that medicine. Just curious. I approached a tourist I knew, a widow from Santa Barbara who is here with four teen-agers on holiday. She was writing a letter in the bar and I asked her if she knew what an ampule was. She didn't. I showed her one and spoke of my problem. I said that it contained a tonic I got from a French doctor and I didn't know quite what to do with it. I had the shiny black ampule in my hand and I said to myself, speaking aloud, "I'm almost sure of one thing, it couldn't be a suppository." There was much laughter and before long a dozen people were around us, trying to be helpful, but not knowing what to do. So I went back to the home of Old Doctor Tallien and told him I had opened the box of ampules and looked at them and, anticipating the day in the distant future when I might want to use them, I was in a quandary. I had the box with me and he reached in and plucked a small strip of metal off the inner cover. He said it was a little saw, with teeth so fine they were all but invisible to the naked eye. What you do, he said, is saw a notch into one pointy end of the ampule. Then you saw a notch at the other end. Using your

thumb, you break off the little glass tit at one end of the ampule, and hold that end over a glass of orange juice, and snap off the other tit, and the medicine flows out of the cartridge. He got a glass of orange juice from the kitchen and demonstrated, and it took him a long time at the sawing, but he made it and then handed the glass to me said, "Go ahead and drink — it will not hurt." I went ahead and drank. It did not hurt.

Back at the hotel, having conquered the ampules, I opened the second box and found a bottle of tiny pink pills. The prescription said I was to take three ampules and nine of the little pills each day and keep this up until the supply was exhausted and then stop. Old Doctor Tallien told me that once I started, it would be about ten days before anything happened. And that after the medicine was used up, I should rest on my oars, so to speak, for a month or so, and then do the whole thing over again. All this, of course, only if the need for such treatment develops. There is no such need right now. My God, I'm as vigorous and virile as a West Point cadet. But I sat and looked at that medicine and being a good deal like Benjamin Franklin, with a great amount of curiosity, I decided I'd just give it a try, experimentally you might say, and see what happens. If it should have the prescribed effect on me, I don't know how I'd be able to tell. We shall see.

Today I went to the bookstore on Avenue Bruat and asked for *The Bounty Trilogy* by Nordhoff and Hall. I read all three novels years ago but now I wanted to read them again. The French proprietor scowled in a manner suggesting I had mentioned something unpleasant. He said he did not have; he did have while say were making see picture but now no more. Did he have more copies ordered? No. Why? "Nobody wishes to hear about any more."

I did not ask him if he had any book of mine. This would have been a foolish question. I have long ago become certain from personal investigation, from explorations by my friends and relatives, and by way of a steady flow of correspondence from readers, that no book of mine is available in any bookstore anywhere in the quote civilized unquote world.

When we first set out on this trip I put us down for two weeks in Tahiti. A few days after our arrival I decided to stay a month. Now it is clear that a month is not nearly enough. I have a peculiar, almost spiritual feeling about this place. It is as if some unseen, prescient hand had constructed this island, and planted it, and arranged its reefs and its mountains and its rivers and, above all, peopled it, with the sole thought in mind that eventually I would be coming along with notebook in hand. In short, that Tahiti was made for me. The Congressman told me several days ago that on his departure the house

he has been occupying will be available and now I have taken it and set March 4 as the date of our departure aboard the *Mariposa*. New Zealand and Australia and Fiji and Samoa can wait.

So tonight we went to the airport to see The Congressman and his lady off for Honolulu and home. Departures by plane from Tahiti are still somewhat of a novelty and much fuss is made over them. Crowds gather two or three times a week in the small temporary air terminal. Flower leis and leis made of small shells are piled on the shoulders of the departing passengers and there is much two-cheek kissing. The flowers have to be discarded before the passengers enter the plane, for they come under the plant ban; the shell necklaces are okay.

While standing around in the airport someone introduced us to Carl Heintz, former head of a big advertising agency in California, now retired. Mr. Heintz and his wife Eleanor are here on their yacht, the *Wanderlure*, which is tied up in front of the Stuart Hotel and which is a real handsome vessel. We have heard about the Heintzes and admired their boat and now Mr. Heintz, obviously a man with two nickels to rub together, has invited us to visit the *Wanderlure*. His ad agency, with headquarters in Los Angeles, is now operated by his sons, one of whom has been here on a brief visit and was heading out on tonight's plane.

There at the airport I remembered a vivid experience of a few nights back. Nelle and I were asleep in our bungalow when, shortly before dawn, we were fetched bolt upright in our beds by the mightiest, most frightening roar I have ever heard. It was both loud and weird, a sound never heard before. I thought it was the Ultimate Roar — the Moment-of-by-god-I-mean-Truth. It has been my good fortune to have a minimum of horror in my life, most of it being in the nature of social embarrassment, but this was something else. It was deafening, but deafening in a new way. There was an echo-chamber tone to it. It wasn't in the room, it was everywhere, the way some people fancy God to be. To my mind it outpointed both the explosion of Krakatoa and the noisiest of the nuclear tests. Coming out of sound sleep to hear it, I was just plain scared at first and then I realized that it could be only one thing — a jet plane flexing its muscles before takeoff. This time the plane was taking off from east to west on the jet strip. It was poised at our end of the runway and later Ralph Varady said that on occasions when the wind is right and other atmospheric conditions favorable, that horrible sound is heard along the blue lagoon. I wondered about the superstitious natives who have little houses in the area, and what they must think on being awakened by such a noise. Ralph said they are now accustomed to it and pay it no mind. He said that since the Americans brought the first rotary egg beater to the island the natives had not been surprised

at anything.

Austin Peterson has described, in his guide to Tahiti, how the natives watched the building of the jet strip. There is a promontory on the Broom Road, between Hotel Tahiti and the airport entrance, from which it is possible to look down on the whole operation. In passing I might remark that this promontory is decorated with a flamboyant tree, sometimes called the royal poinciana, of almost perfect proportions and dazzling color; you come round a bend in the road and it bursts upon you, outlined against the sky, and then you are within a few feet of it and can see the gorgeous blossoms. It is probably the most beautiful tree I've ever seen and surely one of the chief sights of Tahiti. "The natives on bikes used to gather here," wrote Mr. Peterson, "and like American sidewalk superintendents, watch the progress of earth-moving machinery." He wondered what thoughts were in the minds of those Tahitian people. I believe I know. They were thinking: more damn foolishness by the terrible wee wees. That is what the natives sometimes call the French.

The airstrip was constructed off shore, in the waters of the lagoon, and I like to think of the men who built it as first cousins to the marine creatures who build the coral reefs out of their own tiny skeletons. Looking down on the long white ribbon of the airstrip I sometimes think of Hugh Troy and his fabulous Senora Cuevas, an old lady who lived in a gingerbread mansion on the island of Guam during the war. Senora Cuevas was a myth, an invention of Hugh Troy, though many people in and out of the Air Force believed in her. She was secretly a great scientist with a laboratory hidden in the basement of her Victorian mansion. Her chief experiment was concerned with the sex life of the coral polyp. She realized that the principal handicap to fighting a war in the vast Pacific was the scarcity of landing strips and she experimented endlessly with polyps and eventually produced a miraculous liquid which accelerated the reproductive activities of these polyps — a Spanish fly for unseen anthozoans. Casks of this jolly soup could be taken out to any point in the Pacific and spread over the surface of the sea. Within *three days*, such was the stepped-up love life of the polyps, a coral island would rise out of the water, smooth-surfaced and elongated, ready for warplanes to land and take off. But, alas, the nuclear fission people beat Senora Cuevas to the punch and brought the war to an end before she could get her project implemented.

Before The Congressman's plane took off tonight we hurried back to Hotel Tahiti so we could witness the departure from the bar terrace. On the terrace we joined Bill Stone, the lawyer-flier-novelist, and his longtime native wife, Teuru, whose name means The Breadfruit. We sat for a while, having drinks. The moon was nearly full and

suspended in exactly the right position for us, and the torches were flaming beautifully along the shore, and the hotel band was playing, of all things, the lovely "Song of the Islands," and then we caught the flash of silver and the plane came up from the runway, groaning for altitude and beautiful against the moon, and I swan I was damn near overcome with flutters and surges of romantic feeling. At that moment I would have settled for life imprisonment on this island.

A bit later a troupe of Tahitian dancers came in and put on their weekly performance. Near us sat a middle-aged couple, Americans, and when the dancing arrived at its most explosively sexual climax, the American gentleman began to show signs of goatish excitement, exclaiming over the classical movements of the brown gals, and his wife said to him, "Oh, for God's sake, Clem. They're simply telling the folk history of the island people." Some history.

December 17

WE ARE delighted with our new home. It is on the other side of town from the Hotel Tahiti and the jet strip. We Dauphine it out the Broom Road, traveling eastward, pass the rickety sports stadium and then duck into an almost hidden driveway to enter a sort of compound, or plantation. The family of Louise Chauvel and Mme. Jeanne Jacquemin owns a large tract of land here, with about ten houses of varying size. Louise and Jeanne are sisters, and their mother occupies one of the houses. Our own establishment, which I shall call *Maison Louise* for the reason that Louise built it and is our landlady, is said to be the grandest house on the premises. It is long and rectangular and low, somewhat in the California style, with the customary corrugated iron roof, painted with red lead which gives it the aspect of delicate tile. The combination living room and dining area is fifty feet long and when all the windows are swung wide we are living in a sort of open-air pavilion. The kitchen is as big as our living room at home, there are two bedrooms and a third chamber at the front of the house that could serve as a bedroom. The house contains one of the biggest private bathrooms in the South Seas, done in green tile with a long counter running down the center—Nelle says she thinks it might be for rubdowns. There is a bidet. I have been told that there are two bathrooms in Tahiti that are bigger than the one in *Maison Louise*. One is in the former Curtis mansion, to the east of us, and one is in the home of Cornelius Crane, a wealthy American who probably got his installed free, being a member of the Crane plumbing family.

Outside our living room is a small swimming pool and one of the most beautiful gardens in all of Tahiti. The planting is superb, much of it the work of Louise Chauvel herself. Many of the flowers and shrubs she brought down from Hawaii. There is a wall of red Croton cutting off the house nearest to us, and then there is hibiscus and bougainvillea and poinsettia and frangipani and lotus and oleander. There is, of course, tiare Tahiti, the flower of this flowery island, known as the true gardenia. The terrace between the house and the lawn where we take the sun has an arbor at one side covered with big yellow flowers, and beneath the vines is white ginger, which gives off the most powerful and pleasing and intoxicating perfume of any flower I've ever encountered. When the wind is right the aroma from the white ginger flows through the open windows and fills the house. A gurgling brook passes through the middle of the garden and flows between the terrace and the swimming pool. The banks of this little stream are lined with flowering shrubs. Louise's house is back of

ours, near an enormous clump of bamboo that must rise to a height of nearly a hundred feet and when the wind is blowing the bamboo produces a deep rattling sound that is not at all unpleasant. There are enough fruit trees on the premises to keep the whole compound supplied. Oranges have become a scarce item in Tahiti, but there are two or three orange trees here, and pomelo grapefruit and limes and beautiful mangoes in great profusion. There is a huge avocado tree towering over Louise's house, and another beyond the bamboo, and there are coconut palms galore with their bright tin bands which keep the rats from getting at the nuts, and breadfruit trees as high as the coconuts. There is coffee growing on the property, and squash and pumpkins of various kinds, and God knows what else. Across the lawn from our terrace is the Hamuta River, a burbling stream about fifteen feet wide. To sum up, Maison Louise is a dream.

After we got settled in we returned to the hotel for something and, wanting to show off our beautiful new home, invited Mrs. Wilson of Santa Barbara — the lady who tried to help me with my ampules — to ride out with us for a drink. Arriving back at the house we found Louise, home from her work at Tahiti Tours, busy watering the garden and we invited her to join us. Louise is part French, part American and part Tahitian. She is vivacious and boiling with energy and has had two or three husbands. We were just getting the drinks poured when along came her sister Jeanne, who has the same qualities as Louise somewhat magnified. With her was a big handsome woman who was identified as a Tahitian scholar and historian. She told me that she had worked as a technical advisor for M-G-M on the Bounty picture and that she had formerly been in charge of the local museum. Then it came back to me — this was the Aurora Natua mentioned in glowing terms by Jack Pugh in that taped interview back at the Fred Beck house in Malibu. I told Miss Natua that I would like to meet with her later, that perhaps she could serve as technical advisor to me. The party now numbered six, and Madame Jeanne was telling stories, at which she is very expert and entertaining. Then into our house, unannounced, walked a little Polynesian woman and a bald Australian gentleman with a strong Outback way of talking. These two said something about having come over from Moorea. Mr. Downunder bounced into our kitchen and fixed additional drinks with our whiskey. I don't care for parties and this was beginning to get unpleasant and so I began throwing out hints, such as whipping my left arm in a great sweeping motion to examine, closely, the dial of my wristwatch. Mrs. Wilson caught on and said that she had to get back to her teen-agers, and Louise and Jeanne and Aurora Natua departed. Nelle and Mrs. Wilson and I got into the Dauphine and just before we pulled away from the house, I saw the Australian

striding briskly down the length of our living room toward our kitchen, and he was singing *I Could Have Danced All Night*. As we drove past the kitchen windows I caught a glimpse of him mixing up more booze, and I spoke some vulgarities and said what the hell kind of a rat trap we got ourselves caught in anyway?

I was in an unhappy frame of mind when we arrived at a Chinese restaurant, called the Canton, for dinner. In the restaurant we found a retired American anthropologist and his wife, people we had met around the hotel, and we joined them for dinner. The anthropologist didn't help matters. In the first place he insisted on ordering our dinner for us in a most knowledgeable way, remarking that they had lived many years in the Orient, and on top of that he ordered the Chinese food in French. That was bad enough, but when the food came both of them *ate with chopsticks*. I glowed inwardly with hate. When we finally escaped to the outdoors it was pouring rain and all the way home the Dauphine took down with pomare (coughing in the night) and at the house the unbidden company had gone but the place was teeming with mosquitoes and blind-leaping crickets and lizards. The final blow came when, with book in hand, I got into bed and found there was no reading light.

"This," I announced, "is a crude and uncivilized jungle house. No reading lights! That beautiful German stereo out there! Full of dead bugs. I know what killed them — all those miserable crappy records in the cabinet. Bugs! Australians! Out we go! First thing in the morning! O-U-T. *Out!*"

December 18

I AWOKE early, soon after five o'clock, and sensed something pleasant in the air. I got up and wandered out to the terrace. The rays of the early sun were rippling across the east lawn. The flowers and the foliage were breathtaking. There were deep reds and burnished reds and bright reds; hard glassy greens and soft greens and lustrous greens; all kinds of pinks and purples and whites and yellows. The living room was wide open to the soft and lovely Tahitian day — no mosquitoes, no lizards, no Australians, no chopsticks, no crickets. Ten thousand birds were singing in the trees and a dozen sportive mynahs were on the lawn. It occurred to me now that a mynah, for all his mischief, is a beautiful bird. Someone told me recently that the mynah birds of Tahiti are remarkably intelligent and even know the value of paper money; if you leave your wallet outdoors on a table, the mynahs will come along, flip it open, and take out the franc notes and fly off with them. They will never bother a credit card.

Then the chickens. Chickens roam the lawns and gardens of the finest Tahitian homes. Maison Louise is no exception. There are two or three dozen chickens belonging to Louise and I get the impression that half of them are roosters. Tahiti is famous for her roosters — they are bigger and their colors are brighter and they are cockier than roosters anywhere else. They walk around our lawn as if they were gods. I have been told that the sex activity of the Tahiti rooster is double that of other roosters and from what I have witnessed already, I believe it. The roosters around Maison Louise have no need of Old Doctor Tallien's pills and ampules. I marvel that they find time to eat.

Louise's chickens roost in the big avocado tree. An hour or so before dark they begin climbing. By nightfall that tree is full of poultry and some of the chickens are in the uppermost branches. When daylight returns they leave the tree one at a time, flying out, for the chickens of the South Pacific are able to use their wings. The Congressman told me that it is quite funny to see the chickens in the early evening, when a sudden loud noise sounds, come flying en masse out of the avocado tree, screeching with fright as they streak through the air, shooting off in all directions and setting the dogs to howling all over the neighborhood.

Now, on this gorgeous morning, into the kitchen came Henryetta. That is what The Congressman called her though her name in Tahitian is something else and sounds vaguely like Henryetta. She is a thin native woman full of nervous energy and she is supposed to cook breakfast for us each morning, and lunch if we want to have it at home. She asked me a question in French which I didn't get. Then she

asked me another, and I didn't understand. After that she pointed toward the bedroom and said, "Ooooman?" She wanted to know where my ooooman was, if my ooooman was going to have breakfast. It was quite the natural thing for her to assume that I had an ooooman with me, not a wife. I clasped my hands together, tilted my head and made the beddy-bye sign. "Ah, slip!" said Henryetta.

Later we talked it over and decided we don't want a cook at all — we prefer to fix our own breakfast — and we notified Louise, expressing the hope that Henryetta would not be offended. There are other servants around the place, all available to us, including a kooky young Tahitian girl named Miri. Louise has befriended Miri and keeps her around for odd jobs and errands and because Miri loves Louise's five dogs. While The Congressman was occupying the house Louise had occasion to give Miri a bawling out. Miri flew out of Louise's house and raced across the lawn and entered our kitchen where she crawled under the breakfast table and sat there in a crouch, her arms folded around her knees, staring straight ahead, motionless, as if she had been hypnotized. The Congressman tried to coax her out. Henryetta had a try at it, but Miri would neither budge nor speak. Then Louise arrived and the moment she entered the kitchen Miri leaped from under the table and went bounding out the door, raced across the grass, went into Louise's house and got under the kitchen table there — in the same posture. It is not wise to chide a Tahitian.

Miri is a handsome girl, in a Tahitian way, well stacked, and she has a strong liking for boys. Not long ago she began to get large around the middle and Louise grew suspicious and questioned her and Miri said, "I am eating too much taro." Louise took her to the hospital to have her baby and the next day when she arrived to visit Miri, the girl was out of bed, dressed, ready for home, and had given the baby to the woman in the next bed, because she had admired it. This is also The Tahitian Way.

Today I called on Dave Cave and told him that when the next real good Dauphine was turned in I would like to have it, my own being somewhat elderly and unpredictable. "How would you like to have a brand new one right now?" said Dave, and gave it to me — Little Old 3700-A. I fell in love with that diminutive white car the minute I hit the road with it. Twice in my life I have had Cadillacs, but I never felt the affection for them that I do for the new Dauph.

I told Dave that we had been shopping for groceries and we were having trouble finding meat. In the butcher shops when they are trimming and wrapping meat I find it necessary to turn my head away — the stuff looks as if the old-time Fijian cannibals had captured a purple enemy and prepared him for the grill, using a dull knife. Dave

told us where to go to get imported frozen New Zealand meat.

Tonight we returned to the Hotel Tahiti to spend the evening with the Bill Krafts, he being a young man who helps run the big airport at Honolulu. Another dancing troupe performed and we sat close up and studied the meaningful movements. The Tahitian hula, as danced by a lone girl, is an exciting thing to watch the first few times you see it, but after that it loses much of its lure, unless you are a dedicated sex maniac. As for the young native men who take part in the group dancing, I don't know what purpose they serve, except in the Mating Jig or whatever they call it, when boy and girl face each other and go through a series of writhing, wriggling, bumping, grinding maneuvers with their heads thrown back and ecstasy showing on their faces. This is a thing that could very easily lead to childbirth, the so-called miracle of life. I would suspect that it sometimes actually does, except that I now know that this kind of dancing merely illustrates the folk history of the Tahitian people.

December 19

IT IS A strange thing how loving I feel toward my Dauphine. I may have to go back to Old Doctor Tallien and ask him if there is a form of degeneracy involving a man and an automobile. This morning I was on the sidewalk across the street from the cathedral. Two old ladies, American tourists, were crossing the intersection. A Dauphine had stopped and then began backing slowly in their direction. One of the old ladies glanced up and saw it coming at her. She gave it a startled look and then, in the crosspatch manner of old ladies, slapped it across the behind with the flat of her hand, at the same time snapping out an angry remark, possibly, "Get away from me, you nasty little thing!" Just as if it had been an unruly dog. I felt for an instant as if I'd enjoy slapping *her* on the rear fender. It hadn't barked at her.

I have been trying to find a charcoal grill for the outdoor cooking of purple meat. At the little store of Yick Sang I bought a 100 pound sack of *charbon*, or genuine tree-style charcoal (most local charcoal is made from coconut shells). A hundred pounds is an awful lot of charcoal but I couldn't make Yick Sang's Chinese girls understand that I wanted only half that much, so I took the big sack. Yick Sang is a nice name, but Nelle prefers Wing Hen, a tailor on the Broom Road. Some Chinese, when they go into retail trade, change their Oriental names to something like Sincere or Conscience — actually the names of stores in the business area of Papeete. It would seem to be a sort of public relations gimmick; would a man named Sincere or a man named Conscience be likely to cheat you on canned butter? The store where we trade, near The Bridge of the Sighing Gendarme, is called Fanao, which means Advantage.

I tried several places, including the Aline department store, without finding an outdoor grill. I was told that certain stores used to stock a few of them but they were all cleaned out by the M-G-M people. Even then many of the Hollywood visitors were too late to get portable grills, so they built their own, adapting Southern California techniques to The Tahitian Way of doing things—first digging a pit, lining it with rocks, and then laying a simple grill across the top. I ran into Ralph Varady at the bank and Ralph knows everything, so I asked him where to get such a grill, and he pointed to a hardware store down the street, a hardware store that sells long-play records and whiskey and paperback books in French, and told me to go there and ask for a Chinaman named Fran-swaw, which I did. Fran-swaw took me into a back room and showed me a grill of the type that slides into an oven. It will go nicely over a rock-lined pit.

I called around at Baldwin Bambridge's *etablissement*, which is in the alley back of the bank, and talked about Tahitian matters with Jack Crawford, a former jazz musician and electronics expert who has been in Tahiti for many years and who works as Baldwin's aide. Jack glanced at my sunburned face and suggested that I get hold of a local product called Monoi Tiare Tahiti. It is bottled coconut oil, scented with the heady fragrance of tiare Tahiti. Later I told Bill Kraft about it and he said that coconut oil in any form is an open invitation to bad sunburn — that coconut oil on the face results in the sun *frying* the face. I am using it, nevertheless, because the very sound of it, Monoi Tiare Tahiti, is so dulcet, so mellifluous, that it could not be anything but a gentle benison. Great Christ this place is getting me in the noggin.

This being my birthday I made my way to the shop of Chao Leon, a handsome Chinese gentleman who has been recommended as about the best man for tailored clothes in Papeete. As a birthday present for myself, I ordered a slack suit. Mr. Leon measured me from chin to heel, setting down Chinese figures on a big order pad. When he had finished he had me write my name at the top of the sheet and I stood looking at it for a while. His measuring had been so thorough and so precise that I realized that here, on this page, in Chinese, was the true me, the essential Smith, the kid from Kisco exactly as he stands at the moment of becoming fifty-four. Better than a death mask. I asked Chao if I could have the sheet later on, saying I wanted to reproduce it in a book. It took some time for me to get this thing through to him but when he finally realized that his writing was to be published, he protested that he had been hasty and careless — that he could write much better, much neater. He said he wanted to do it over, properly, and I agreed. On the opposite page, then, is the intrinsic, purebred, incarnate Me.

He handed it to me and said, "You make good job my name? You make good job put address Mosha Fush?" I told him I make good job. Ah, the incursion of the ways moderne! The far-flung influence of Madison Avenue! Mosha Fush? That is the name of the street where his tailor shop is located: Rue du Marechal Foch.

H. Allen Smith

Handwritten notes in Chinese characters, arranged in several vertical columns. The text is written in a cursive style. Some legible characters include: 王 (Wang), 五 (Wu), 名 (Name), 上 (Up/Top), 2510, Page, 一 (One), 事 (Matter), 有 (Have), 云 (Cloud/Say), 理 (Reason/Principle), 天 (Heaven), 下 (Down/Under), 心 (Heart/Mind), 性 (Nature/Character), 略 (Briefly/Slightly), 者 (Possessive particle), 之 (Possessive particle), 也 (Particle), 矣 (Particle), 乎 (Particle), 哉 (Particle), 耶 (Particle), 乎 (Particle), 矣 (Particle), 哉 (Particle), 耶 (Particle).

And now for an unpleasant matter, an example of man's inhumanity to man. There is a tourist gentleman here by the name of Rynar. He was supposed to leave by plane last week and a couple of hours before takeoff time I was talking to him at the Hotel Tahiti. He is about sixty years old and under the influence of several rum punches he told me that life is over for him because he cannot do any good with the ladies any more. He said he had never fully realized what a tragedy this can be until he arrived in Tahiti and saw all this excellent stuff lying around loose. I must have been in a compassionate mood because I told him about my little pink pills and my big black ampules. He got real excited, especially when I told him the stuff came from a benign old French doctor, and he began begging me for the prescription. Realizing that he would, in a matter of minutes, be gone from Tahiti forever, I gave him what he wanted. He was so thrilled that he went off his nut a little and started buying drinks for everyone in sight and then goosed one of the waitresses. And he missed his plane. He has been around town ever since, having decided to stay an additional week, and, being a man with a loud face, he has been blabbing. He has told various aging men that I have The Secret and now these men are coming to me and

pleading with me to succor them in their great distress. In one instance at Bar Vaima I ran into an American man who is a few years older than me and who was with his wife. He didn't say a word to me about the pills and elixir, but his wife did. "Will you," she said, "in the name of God please see that Everett gets some of that stuff? Please!" She sounded like a woman in need, but I would not yield, and I was sore as hell at Rynar. The next time I saw him I accused him of low treachery, and he replied: "Listen, don't you know that all is fair in love and war?" I earnestly hope he gets a social disease.

December 20

THIS MORNING we went again to Baldwin Bambridge's office. We have been seeing him from time to time, for he is one of the real personalities of Tahiti. He is a leading light in a numerous family — there are Bambridges everywhere you look. His uncle, Tony Bambridge, is the nearest thing to a mogul, or tycoon, on the island and it is said that all officialdom, territorial and municipal, hops through the hoop when Tony Bambridge speaks.

Baldwin is called *Baldween* by the natives; for the reason that there are so many Bambridges around, he always uses his first name as his trademark. He is a big, heavy man, over six feet tall, bald, and with a mouth full of large and handsomely bucked teeth. He is Tahiti agent for the Matson Lines. He is an importer, representing General Motors, the American Express, Royal Typewriters, and Hammond Organ among other American firms. He had told me that there are only three Hammond organs in Tahiti, one in the Mormon Temple, one in the Presbyterian Church, and one in his office. I wanted to have a whirl at the one in his office. It was pretty weatherbeaten but Baldwin got it hooked up and I sat down and started to play. Judging from the wild warbling sounds that came from the speaker, half the tubes were shot, the interior was rusted beyond salvation, and the motors had not been oiled in the present century. Baldwin himself took over and, flashing his big teeth, played "Fascination" so that it almost sounded like "Fascination"; but then he understands the eccentricities of his Jurassic Age machine. Furthermore, he is an oldtime dance band man, talented on piano and accordion. I had a second try at it, playing the "Hawaiian Wedding Song." Never has such sadness, such a threnody, throbbed and vibrated through a hostile tropic atmosphere. The employees of the Baldwin office were showing signs of throwing up, and so I quit.

Baldwin took us to lunch and over miserable Chinese food told us some things about himself and the Bambridge family. He is a vegetarian and a strict teetotaler in a family that has a reputation for liking the bottle. He speaks French, Tahitian, some Spanish, and his English is often original and decorative. He said that his great-grandfather was from Norwich in England where "all the Bambridges were monocle-on-the-eye people." Baldwin, who fancies himself as an actor, made a monocle with his forefinger and thumb, applied it to his eye, threw his head back and then made with the teeth like an Englishman. He also has a mock-dramatic way of widening and popping his eyes for emphasis just after he has said something which he believes to be tremendously important.

The first Bambridge in Tahiti was Thomas, who ran away from home and shipped as a cabin boy a hundred and fifty years ago. In Tahiti he married a native girl and took her into the secluded hills back of Maison Louise. Thomas Bambridge had a strong dislike for people and saw as little of them as possible. He was not consistent, however, for he manufactured the very things he disliked, reproducing his own kind to the number of twenty-two. Baldwin says he thinks he inherits a hankering for the lonely life from Thomas. He has a "country home" out in Mataiea district where Gauguin once lived and Rupert Brooke visited. He described his place as a back-to-nature type of house with no electricity and no telephone. He retires to this place whenever he can get away from his business, sometimes staying four or five days, eating his vegetables and "adding up the scores."

His father, Georges Bambridge, was mayor of Papeete for quite a long while, including the rough years of World War II. Baldwin was one of seven children and the family factoring business occupied the wooden building which now houses the bank. The Bambridge home was on the second floor of the building.

Baldwin told us that he brought the first and only Cadillac to Tahiti, for his own use, but he had to give it up because it excited too much envy and snottiness among the top French *fonctionnaires*, right up to and including the Governor. So Baldwin shipped it away, to somebody in New Caledonia, and today he drives a handsome bright-red Impala in a town where cars of such coloration and such bulk are rare.

After lunch he took us out the west shore to show us some of the more interesting homes and bungalow colonies. He turned in at one place, driving toward the seashore, and stopped where an elderly woman and a younger one were poking long sticks at some avocados in a tree. Baldwin talked to them in Tahitian and then drove on to a rambling green house, of a shape that suggested several boxcars stuck together and elevated on stilts. I asked him who the old lady was and he said Mrs. Nordhoff and I said was she related by any chance to Charles Nordhoff and Baldwin said she's his wife and I said Jesus Christ is this the Nordhoff place and he said that's the house he built and lived in. The widow and one son, Jimmie, occupy the green house and Jimmie has built some thatched bungalows on the premises and rents them out to tourists. Another son, Charlie, is married and lives nearby and has been described as a true Tahitian, with no ambition in life beyond fishing and loving and playing the guitar and singing and drinking Hinano. We are acquainted with Nancy Hall Rutgers, the handsome and captivating daughter of the late James Norman Hall, but this was our first contact with the Nordhoff side of the Great Collaboration.

I have been trying to condition my feet to go-aheads, known also as thongs, sometimes called slip-slops (a slipslop is also another word for a malapropism). These sandals have a single thong that goes between the big toe and its nearest neighbor and after a while that area begins to chafe and ache. My sore toes have taken me back to that period years ago when I tried to learn the guitar and my fingers got raw and sore and a girl musician told me how to toughen them the way professional guitarists do it. I was instructed to soak my fingers in vinegar and then hold them over a candle flame until the heat became unbearable. That's how I happened to become an organist. And now I've decided against using the same procedure with my toes because I have noticed that Baldwin, who has worn go-aheads most of his life, is having toe trouble. On his left foot both his big toe and his index toe are swathed in adhesive wrappings. If he can get go-ahead toe, then I suppose I can put up with it.

Our habit of saying, again and again, "Well, who'd have ever dreamed a year ago that some day I'd be sitting in Tahiti doing thus-and-so" has been brought to an end. Today I drove in toward town to a rickety Chinese store with a porch full of watermelons. A little old Chinese man saw me thumping the melons with my knuckles, the way we did it when I was a child. He came over and smiled and in a gentle way corrected my technique, thumping the melons with the heel of his hand, and then he selected one for me. I took it home and we cut it open and it was as good as any watermelon that ever grew in Georgia. I told Nelle to use some oiled paper to cover the remaining part of the melon. She didn't have any oiled paper but she got out a plastic suit-cover and washed it and then said: "I'll bet this plastic suit-cover from the Mount Kisco Laundry never dreamed that some day it would be clear out here in Tahiti wrapped around half of a Polynesian watermelon." I said please. That's enough. No more.

Bill Stone, who spends most of his time in a wheel chair because of an attack of polio that incapacitated him many years back, lives just a short distance from us. His splendid house, beautifully arranged and furnished beneath its thatched roof, is on the black beach next door to the abandoned Royal Tahitian Hotel. Bill is one of the most distinguished-looking men in Tahiti and devotes much of his time to his desk where he works at managerial matters for the Hotel Tahiti. There is no longer an American consul in Tahiti, but Bill Stone is a sort of ex-officio consul, being a Harvard-trained lawyer and a man with multitudes of friends in every walk of Tahitian life. His father was an American naval officer and Bill saw a lot of the world as a youngster; during two years on Guam he developed an appetite for life in the Pacific islands. After Harvard he became a professional flier in Tucson, making many charter trips into Mexico, where he learned

to love both the country and the people. He set up a law office in Tucson and likely would be there yet if it had not been for the polio that struck him in 1935. That same year he sold his first piece of writing, a story that appeared in *Vanity Fair*. He went to Warm Springs for treatment and met Franklin Roosevelt there and one evening a new movie was brought in for the President and all the other polio patients. It was the Charles Laughton-Clark Gable *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Bill Stone saw the scenes shot in Tahiti and then found a book by Alex Waugh dealing in part with the island. He had a strong itch to visit Tahiti and a feeling that swimming in the warm waters of the lagoons might be beneficial. He came to Tahiti and met the beautiful native girl Teuru and she persuaded him to go to the island of Huahine, where she was born. There he passed the time learning the native language and after six months returned to the States. He was not satisfied with the old way of life, but found himself thinking of the South Seas and Teuru and so he made his decision — to settle in Tahiti and make his living as a writer. His best book, *Tahiti Landfall*, is an account of his early years among the Tahitians.

Bill Stone leads a busy and productive life. For the most part he stays close to his comfortable home with Teuru and their adopted son, Tony. It is becoming a custom for us to stop in on him every two or three days. He is a fountain of information about Tahiti and, being a writer, he has a pretty good idea about the kind of thing I'm after. Today we talked about spices and herbs. It is a strange thing that Tahiti, with its colorful South Sea waterfront and its strong Oriental flavor — a place where one might expect spices and herbs to be available in great abundance, and to permeate the air with their fragrances — should have almost none. I have not been able to find black pepper in any store in Papeete and as for basil and thyme and oregano and bay leaf and marjoram, they are unknown to the storekeepers of Tahiti. Bill Stone said his old friend Eddie Lund, who is Tahiti's top musician and recording entrepreneur, is also a gourmet of sorts and has to get his spices and herbs sent down from California.

Back at Maison Louise this evening I put together my New York *Times* beef stew, so called from the fact that my recipe was published in that newspaper. I used the cannibal-type purple meat but cooked it a long time. Standard American vegetables take on funny shapes here, including the carrots and the cabbages, but the taste is all right, and I used some tiny red peppers which grow on a bush ten steps from our living room — when I first saw them I thought they were berries and I popped one into my mouth and took a bite and my teeth began to rattle in my head like castanets. The Tahitian hot pepper, no bigger than a small bean, has authority. It turned out to be a real fine stew, and for a good reason: I am a stew maker from who-laid-the-chunk. I

simply cannot compose a bad one.

Bit by bit we are getting a better picture of the M-G-M invasion of a year ago. It coincided with the first big government campaign to attract more tourists to the islands. The French authorities blow hot and cold on the subject of tourism. One year they are doing everything they can to attract visitors, and the next year they are equally assiduous throwing up road blocks against tourists. Last year they started building the jet strip and arrangements were made for many more hotel rooms, and advertising was started, and a clever young Frenchman named Godefroy de Noailat arrived to mastermind the tourism program. At the same time, by sheer coincidence, M-G-M came on the scene.

Tahiti was all wrapped up in its tourist program, and regarded the M-G-M invasion with a cautious and suspicious eye. The movie people, they felt, would foul things up. They would spoil the taxi drivers and the waitresses and the domestic help through excessive wages and tipping. They would ruin the economy for all time to come. Whether they did or not remains a question still under argument; most people say things will never be the same. But, then, things have never been the same since one lone, somewhat bashful Irishman came here in 1914, a man by the name of Frederick O'Brien.

The business people of Tahiti scarcely noticed the economic impact of the movie people on the island. Papeete was buzzing with commercial activity, and traffic all over the island was heavy, and the stores and restaurants were crowded, and the leaders of local enterprise rubbed their hands together and said, "See how simple it was? Tourists! Hundreds of tourists! I told you we'd get them!"

Then M-G-M finished up and departed after spending the better part of a year on the island. Business went into a nosedive. Even today some of the merchants are using a gimmick that was unknown to the South Pacific before — the clearance sale, with merchandise going at less than cost. In the M-G-M months they all overstocked, ordering goods by the shipload, loading up for the kill, and then the bubble collapsed. They had to do something to raise money to meet their obligations, hence this new thing, the clearance sale.

It is worth noting, also, that the rental of private houses and hotel bungalows, at highly inflated prices, became a big thing during the M-G-M invasion. Many individuals with capital, including some native Tahitians, began putting up houses and bungalows in the naive belief that prices would remain sky-high forever. They behaved as if a hundred thousand people were heading for Tahiti with the intention of settling permanently on the island. The strange thing is that today some of them are still building.

I HAVE been trying to find an answer to the nagging question: why do the velvet-skinned girls of Tahiti have such miserable teeth? An American novelist says it's a lack of minerals in the water; yet the Tahitians have been drinking the same mountain water for centuries and they all had splendid teeth even as late as the time of Paul Gauguin. The best explanation seems to be that the Tahitians have changed their diet in recent decades. For generations they lived on fruit and fish but in recent times, especially since the end of War Two, they have grown fond of imported groceries. Today their favorite food is canned corned beef, shipped in from New Zealand. In some of the Chinese stores along the outlying stretches of the Broom Road one whole wall of shelves will contain corned beef in cans.

One thing is dear — the girls don't bother much about dentists. Some of them have had teeth extracted, leaving large gaps in their smiles; others go around with snags that are not comely. It seems probable that the native men have no objection to a woman being snaggle-toothed, or minus teeth altogether. On the other hand some visiting writers say the girls do worry about their teeth, and that the way to make it with a Tahitian lady is to buy her a set of dentures. This is merely an attempt on the part of the writers to make a smart remark. I say so with considerable authority, for I am a writer who makes smart remarks.

We went into a milk bar near Cine Rex today and the girl who waited on us was a beauty, almost pure Chinese but with a hint of Tahiti in the shade of her lovely pelt and maybe a touch of French reflected in her face. She smiled when she set down our Cokes. Her teeth were glistening and orderly and when she was gone Nelle said, "False." She believes that she is infallible in spotting false teeth although I think she sometimes overdoes her *weisenheimering*. I have in mind her habit, when we are watching television at home, of looking at jazz musicians — all jazz musicians — and saying, "He's doped up. Full of hop." She even believes that Lawrence Welk talks funny because he is full of cotton rinsings and nose candy. Her blanket indictment of all musicians led me to say, once, when we were looking at a movie of Toscanini conducting, "Watch him. He's had a fix." But then I have a similar idiosyncrasy — I believe that I am infallible in spotting the television performers who wear toupees. One quick look and I say, "Hair piece!" I can always tell. A big occasion at our house, to be sure, is the day when we spot a musician full of junk and wearing a hair piece.

Which leads us right back to Baldwin Bambridge. The other day

Baldwin asked me if I knew Bing Crosby. I said I did. Baldwin got all squirmy with anticipation and then said: "We live so far away from the rest of the world that we've never been able to get the truth about one thing. Tell me the truth now, does Crosby wear a toe-pee?" I said yes. Baldwin's eyes bugged out and he flashed his teeth in a large grin. "Is he," he asked eagerly, "is he as bald as I am?" I knew the response he wanted but I am an honest man. "No," I said, "not quite." Did I mention before that Baldwin likes the ladies? He has had approximately five wives in The Tahitian Way. He is proud of his conquests and he doesn't mind when his friends josh him about his love life and call him "the Tahitian Yul Brynner."

I keep looking at men with beards along the streets of Papeete and wondering if they are Bengt Danielsson. His name is spoken frequently in Tahiti and various people have told me I must meet him and talk with him for he is not only an erudite man but a witty one. I have been reading his most famous book, *Love in the South Seas*. Up until the time copies of this book arrived in Tahiti, Mr. Danielsson was accorded great respect and admiration. He had been perhaps the most colorful member of the Kon-Tiki crew, he had conducted anthropological investigations in various parts of the South Pacific, and important scientists and writers came to Tahiti to consult with him. But this book, dealing frankly with the sex life of the Polynesians, proved shocking to some of the people here. The puritanical astringencies of the missionaries still prevail, to some extent, in this land they called the filthy Sodom. A French-Tahitian woman not known for her pruderies told me: "I do not like Bengt Danielsson any more. I do not believe anything in that awful book. How could he possibly *know* such things?" And a bookish American who lives with a *vahine* and considers himself to be the leading local authority on the South Seas complained: "That Danielsson has a lot of gall, making himself out to be an expert on Polynesian love. He has never in his life slept with a Polynesian woman, so how could he possibly know anything about them?"

I've also acquired a couple of books about Gauguin, and some paperback copies of *Island of Love*, by Robert Langdon. I first encountered this book in the *Mariposa* library. I passed it by several times because its tide and its gaudy stamping led me to think it was a cheap sex novel. Then I happened to pull it out of the shelf, and glanced through it, and found it to be a serious work; it is the only book about Tahiti in English that gives a readable and dramatic account of the island's history. The local bookstores have now received shipments of the paperback edition and I have been buying it and handing it around to my friends — nobody here seems to have heard of it, except that same Bengt Danielsson, who checked over

the manuscript for the author.

While we were in the bookstore Nelle fell into conversation with a young man who said he was a civil engineer back in the States and that he had been loafing around Tahiti for the last four months. He seemed to be an intelligent fellow, so I said:

"You've probably had a lot of unusual experiences here in the four months."

"Oh, yes."

"I'd like," I said, "to get together with you and talk about them some day soon. They might fit into a book I'm working on."

"Well," he said, hesitantly, "I've written them down."

It figured. "Oh," I said, "you're writing *your own* book?"

"That's right."

There are multitudes like him in the world today. People getting out of bed and saying, well, I got nothing to do today, reckon I'll haul off and write a book. I wish just a few of them would say, I reckon I'll haul off and practice a little medicine, or compose a little symphony, or practice a little law, or civil engineer a little superhighway.

Aurora Natua, the Tahitian scholar, came riding up to the house today on her blue motor hike, which she calls Mignonette, and we reached an agreement under which she will spend one or two days a week with us, showing us around, acting as interpreter, answering the many questions that arise in the course of a day's adventuring. She sat down in the living room and pulled out half a dozen Christmas cards that had just come from M-G-M people in California. We had all but forgotten that Christmastime is here — there is very little evidence of it in Tahiti. But now Aurora, a woman of almost childish enthusiasm for minor pleasures, began reading the printed sentiments from the Christmas cards — reading them with emotion and feeling, exclaiming over the beauty of the thought conveyed. It had never occurred to me that there are people who actually *read* that verbal succotash. I told Aurora that I get hundreds of such cards and never read any of them and she was astonished, insisting that she thinks they are simply beautiful. She showed me an embossed illustration of a white bird on one of her cards and she caressed it with her fingers and spoke feelingly about it. She is clearly a person of strong sentimental bent. Whereas the *fellahin* of M-G-M are remembered with disfavor by most of Tahiti, Aurora says she loves them, loves them all, and will go to the grave being grateful to them. As head of the little museum here she was paid no more than enough to sustain life for herself and her mother, but when she went on the M-G-M payroll, her salary was huge by Tahitian standards. It had always been her ambition to own a small bit of land, a fragment of the island she loves, and M-G-M made this possible. She now has a building lot on a hill behind our house

and eventually she will have a home there.

This afternoon we visited the Heintz yacht, the *Wanderlure*, and inspected everything from cabins to galley. Here, in the floating abode of California-type Americans, there was further evidence of Christmas — dozens of greeting cards stuck around the walls of the saloon, and a five-foot ironwood tree being decorated by the boys of the crew. The Yuletide atmosphere somehow doesn't stir us. We miss Christmas about as much as we miss television soap opera.

December 22

WE KEEP trying to remember the stirring words of Desmond Slattery urging us to know and understand and respect bugs, but here in Paradise it takes some doing. Those magnificently constructed friends of man, the cockroaches, are numerous and enormous and unstampoutable. Dave Cave saw me kill a whopper one evening and told me I was wasting my time, that whenever a cockroach dies, two cockroaches are sent out to replace him. Still I continue my war against them and I now have spray cans of powerful bug-killer in every room of the house. I assault the cockroaches individually, giving them each a good shot in the snoot whenever they show themselves. And the same for the big crickets that come flying through the windows all evening long, clutching at my face and neck, getting tangled in my hair, climbing up my legs. Praise Allah for one thing — the famed Tahitian rats seem to stay away from our house. On the other hand, there are nasty, villainous eels in the little brook that flows below the living-room windows. Now and then, in the evening, these eels flop around and make splashing noises and this is disconcerting to me because of what they do in the daytime. The chickens, in moving around the property, know how to jump over the brook. The young ones, the chicks, try to emulate the old folks and often fall into the stream. This can be disastrous if the eels are about. They chew up their victims, and this is not a polite thing to do.

There is, also, the matter of the lizard droppings mentioned so long ago back in Malibu Beach. The lizards, in this respect, are somewhat like a pigeon or other large bird. Each morning the borders of the floor are quite messy. My first duty, on these golden Tahitian mornings, is to get the broom and go to work while Nelle prepares the breakfast. As I sweep I keep thinking of a saying that is sometimes heard in the rural areas of Virginia: “We live so fur back in the woods that the first thing we have to do every morning is sweep the coon-farts outa the kitchen.”

Two young men from the local French newspaper, *Les Nouvelles*, met me today at Bill Stone’s house for an interview and photograph. One of them, Charles Petras, began out here as an importer and then became a reporter. Gerard Pugin began as a soldier and is now staff photographer. Both boys, being fairly new to journalism, enjoyed such stories as I was able to tell them out of my lurid newspaper past. Petras told me he was a great fan of our cowboy movies, but he is disappointed with many of them. Said he: “I wish for integrity, and is not always present.” He has read the authentic history of the American West and he knows the truth about I Wild Bill Hickok and

Bat Masterson and Billy the Kid and the Cisco Kid, and he knows that these men have been portrayed as the exact opposite of what they really were. "I have even read," said M. Petras, "that Hickok was of the effeminate way." This French boy knows more about the Wild West than I do.

He told me also that there is a local saying about writers: If you come to Tahiti and stay two weeks you write a book; if you stay a year you write two pages; if you stay ten years you never write a line.

The chopstick-wielding anthropologist has loaned us a book by Caroline Guild, who came to Tahiti with her husband and daughter thirty-odd years ago and built a splendid home about halfway down the west shore of the island. Her book tells us a lot about how it was in Tahiti during the years between the two big wars.

We ran into the Ed Scofields from Vancouver today and Ed said that if I didn't know it there are two trees on One Tree Hill. This is a promontory a few kilometers east of our house, a cliff from which you can get a magnificent view of Matavai Bay — the anchorage of the early ships, including those of Wallis and Cook and the London Missionary Society and Captain Bligh. Ed was up there today taking some pictures. As he was preparing to leave, he was backing his Dauphine and keeping an eye on the one tree of One Tree Hill and he hit another tree, crumpling a fender.

Medical note: Cut a lime and rub the juice on a mosquito bite. Takes the itch out of it.

Cooking note: If your meat looks tough, wrap it in papaya leaves and let it stay there a few hours. Makes it tender. The natives did this long before Adolph found out that papaya tenderizes.

Poultry note: All the young chickens, of pullet age, that hang around our yard seem to have the pip, I know about pip and its symptoms because I once asked Jim Street about it. Mr. Street, a novelist of the South and for many years my good friend, gave me a graphic impersonation of a chicken with the pip. He was, in a way, a great actor. I never saw a human look more like a critically sick chicken, and for a few moments I felt genuine pity for him.

Historical note: Four out of five books about the South Pacific say that Cook called this group the Society Islands in honor of the Royal Society of London. Shows how sloppy the average author is in his research. Cook himself said he called the islands Society because of the way they lay adjacent to one another.

Art note: Since our arrival we have run into Emile Gauguin from time to time. He sits on the sidewalk in front of a garage, just around the corner from Bar Vaima, wearing nothing but a pair of faded shorts, his large belly giving him a bloated look, and he works at making cylindrical fish traps out of bamboo. He sells these to tourists for

enough francs to provide a little food and, in flush times, a few bottles of Hinano beer. He sometimes steals things when he is real thirsty. Lately he has been in and out of jail, spending more time there than at the garage (his sleeping place is a dirt floor in a ramshackle room behind the garage). He is a natural son of Paul Gauguin but his father never acknowledged him before the law. Emile was at one time a respectable but slow-witted fisherman with an expanding family of brown-skinned children. Tourists heard about him and began seeking him out and asking him to pose for pictures and trying to question him about his celebrated father and even asking for his autograph. He could not write, could not even sign his name, but he learned to scrawl "Gauguin" and then, because the tourists were making demands on his time, he began asking them for money. They paid it gladly, and he saw that he had a good thing at hand, and he took advantage of it. Before long he gave up fishing and began meeting the boats. He would walk up to the tourists and say, "Me Gauguin. Pose pictures. Five francs." The government didn't like this, in the beginning, and when he refused to stop they exiled him and his family to the island of Raiatea. Eventually Emile returned to Papeete, leaving his family on the other island. He builds his fish traps and sells them to tourists but in a pinch he'll still offer to pose for photographs for money, or if he's in a hurry for dough he'll simply say, "Me Gauguin. Me great. Give twenty francs."

Leisure note: Tahitians do not believe in overexerting themselves under any circumstances. In 1958 there were political riots on the waterfront and a mob stormed the Territorial Assembly. Many rocks were thrown through the windows of the building. These rocks were brought up in waist-high trucks so the rioters would not have to stoop down and pick them up off the ground.

Textile note: William Morris was a famous poet, critic and painter in nineteenth-century England. He didn't like the stodginess of the Victorian Era. He designed the fabric which is now almost the symbol of Tahiti — the pareu cloth, featuring big white flowers on a blue or red background. Prior to the importation of this fabric from the mills of Manchester, Tahitian ladies wore pareus made of tapa cloth. This was made from the bark of the paper mulberry, and it had an interesting quality: it disintegrated when the girls wore it in swimming.

Psychic Science note: The ghosts of Tahiti are legion and are called *tupapaus*. Years ago Douglas Fairbanks the Elder came here to shoot scenes for *Robinson Crusoe*. He leased a nice house. Within a couple of days he moved out. He said a *tupapau* kept coming into his room in the night and hurling him out of bed. He was the one who, in films, could lick anybody on earth.

December 23

IN THE last year or so Papeete has acquired a department store and a supermarket. Both are run by Chinese. The department store is Aline's and the supermarket is called Sin Tung Hing. Both have a bright modern appearance and both are facing the harbor. Yet they have one major failing. Nobody has told them that they must go over their stock every few days with a dust cloth. Almost every item in the two stores is covered with a film of dust and this can be especially irksome when it comes to crockery and other tableware and pots and pans.

Whenever I am in either of these stores and feel the grit I have an urge to tell the proprietors that they ought to hire our Onna. She is a Polynesian girl from the Austral Islands, which lie far to the south of Tahiti. She has a primitive, almost savage look, and a plow-horse approach to hard work. She is one of Louise's employees and one day a week she goes through our house like a brown cyclone. When Onna cleans she takes a broom and actually sweeps the ceilings. She has the arms and legs of a wrestler and yet she manages to look trim and female, if not feminine. Our furniture is made of a native wood that is as heavy as lead, but Onna hoists it up and hurls it around as if it were teak or bamboo. She is a great hand at waxing and it is a pleasure to watch her on a good hot day, sprawled on the floor, applying the wax with speed and vigor as if the world were coming to an end in fifteen minutes and God Almighty would be walking through this room. As Onna works at a tough job she gives forth great sighs and groans, sounding like a soul in torment, but she gets the job done. She always works barefooted with a skimpy pareu wrapped around her middle, drooping as if it were ready to fall off, and a bra enclosing the important remainder. She sweats gallons, but there is always a fresh flower in her black hair or behind her ear. She has two large rags and as she moves about the house she keeps them beneath her bare feet, and travels in the manner of a skater. Thus in the kitchen, when she moves from sink to cabinet to stove she goes in sweeping semicircles, skating her rags methodically so as to cover the whole waxed area. In this way she keeps the floors throughout the house in a high state of glossiness. If she turns up a piece of heavy furniture and uncovers a boiling nest of ants or termites, she calmly steps out of her waxing rags and stomps the bejesus out of the bugs with her bare feet. At the close of her day she wipes off the sweat, adjusts her sagging pareu, and goes into the garden to gather blossoms. She arranges great jars of torch ginger in the corners of the big room. She is as artistic in her flower arrangements as any Connecticut matron. She lays flowers

in attractive wooden trays on the coffee tables, on the built-in bar, on the stereo, on the dining room table, and she entwines them among the blades of the electric fan. Sometimes she places a single white ginger blossom on my typewriter because she knows I am daffy about this flower.

Onna knows only a few words of English and so most of our communication with her is by sign language. In addition to her other qualities she has a fine sense of humor and laughs a lot at things that go wrong. A few days ago I went into the bath auditorium (it's that big) and she was working in there. She urged me over to the tiled counter and pointed to my electric shaver. It is a cordless model and when not in use is perched on a charging stand and a tiny electric bulb indicates that all is well. Onna wanted to know what it was. I removed the shaver from its stand, held it out in front of me, then flicked the switch without letting her see me do it. As the shaver gave forth its strong buzzing sound, I pretended that it was trying to get away from me, pulling in the direction of the window, and that I had to use both hands to hold it hack. Onna stood transfixed for a few seconds, her mouth open, and then she let out a screech and fled from the room. It took a while for me to convince her that the whole thing was a joke, and I had to demonstrate the true purpose of the buzzing monster before she finally caught on. Then she almost collapsed with laughter.

Baldwin Bambridge and I are going to the island of Bora Bora the day after Christmas and so I called on him today to discuss arrangements. He gave me some tickets and some instructions and after we finished with that, he leaned forward and said: "There are seven basic colors, but the color of Tahiti is not among them. Many have tried to find it, the color of Tahiti, and to write about it, but nobody has succeeded. Maybe you will find it." I hadn't suspected him of such poetic depths.

We walked over to Tony Bambridge's office and met Tony's assistant, Robert Chevalier. Roh-bair is the meanest, most villainous-looking Tahitian I have yet seen; I wouldn't want to meet up with him in a *light* alley. Yet I have heard that he is a kindly and sentimental man, much given to friendly joking. Baldwin told him that there was a certain motion picture I wanted to see. Said Robert: "If it was for *you* I wouldn't do it." Baldwin leveled a finger at him and said: "Watch it. No ice cream next ship." It developed that Robert has an abiding passion for the vanilla ice cream that is served on the Matson liners. Baldwin, being the Matson agent here, can get a few quarts of that ice cream for Robert whenever one of the ships is in port. By threatening to withhold it, he is able to get Robert to perform various services for him.

Back in Bambridge Alley, which runs alongside the bank, I glanced into the barber shop and saw a young man picking at the strings of a guitar as he awaited his turn in the chair. Nobody seemed to be paying any attention to him and I thought it a pleasant way to spend that unpleasant waiting time.

I think, also, that I saw Bengt Danielsson there in the alley. A couple of days ago I spotted a chunky man with a white beard and a general resemblance to Monty Woolley coming out of the post office. This one had to be the Swede. But it wasn't. Bill Kraft told me he had met Danielsson and that his whiskers are red. So now two men came walking toward me, headed for the barber shop. One of these men was slender and had a reddish beard and the overall look of D. H. Lawrence, who in turn was often described as resembling the classical image of Christ. This, beyond question, was Danielsson. He was with a young man who had bleached white hair and an Amish-looking blond beard and ragged shorts. They both had a pronounced Biblical appearance. I would have introduced myself to Danielsson except that I was a little skittish about the blond guy. He looked as though he might be a trifle gay. I watched them enter the shop and thought that I would enjoy getting them in the chair and whacking off those whiskers. The beard has become the badge of adventuresome jerks, at home and abroad, and every yacht that ties up here turns loose young men who are trying to look like prophets of the desert, and still others come crawling out of the fo'c'sles of the freighters wearing enough whiskers to stuff a sofa. I'm strong for nonconforming but not with beards. That goes double for my old friend Jim Moran, and triple for Peter Ustinov.

This afternoon Carl and Eleanor Heintz came to our house for a visit. We settled down on the terrace and our new friends told us all about their great adventure — traveling around the world aboard the *Wanderlure*. They have been boat people for a long time and when Carl retired from his advertising agency in 1960 they began planning their three-year cruise. They went all over Europe shopping for a yacht that would suit their purposes, and didn't find it, so they came home and made plans to build one that would be exactly right. I judged from their talk that they wanted a boat that would have some danger built into it — there could be no real fun in going around the world in a vessel that was absolutely safe. It's much nicer to have a yacht that's likely to turn over in a storm, or explode in the Tasman Sea. The Heintzes ended up at a back-country boatyard on an Alabama bayou. They moved into a shabby houseboat and stayed there four months, supervising the building of the *Wanderlure*. She is a ketch-rigged, motor sailer, sixty-eight feet long, diesel-powered and cruises at nine knots. They started out from Florida, hit the Dry

Tortugas, skirted Cuba, visited the island of Cozumel, then Belize in Honduras, and off Central America they were boarded by armed men drunk as rear admirals and these ruffians seized their stores in the name of their sovereign government. They made it to the Panama Canal and through to the Balboa Yacht Club, which is the jumping-off place for the South Pacific. They were halfway out to the Galapagos when one of the boys in the crew of three got an attack of appendicitis, so they turned back and raced through stormy seas to Panama again, where the young man's appendix was removed in the very nick of time. They waited for him to recover, then set out again, cruising 3600 miles to the Marquesas and on to Papeete. They got here November 1st and by now they have become almost as much a fixture on the waterfront as the *Wanderer*, the yacht that created so much of a stir when it belonged to Sterling Hayden. The *Wanderlure* represents the finest in present-day yacht construction and scientific equipment; the *Wanderer* is a graceful, elegant, old-time sailing yacht. They are tied up alongside each other and I think it would be interesting to see what happened if they mated.

We enjoyed the visit with the Heintzes for their tales of adventure and their plans for the future — they are most eager to cruise to the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, a place that has attracted their interest more than any other. We enjoyed them for a further reason: Eleanor Heintz brought us, out of the *Wanderlure's* stores, a large container of good black pepper.

After taking the Heintzes back to their boat, we loafed along the waterfront and ran into a young Tahitian cab driver with whom we have become acquainted. He is a nice-looking young man except for his teeth and I cultivate his friendship because I like to hear him talk. He speaks the most bewildering pidgin I've ever heard. Most of the time I have no idea what he is talking about but he hangs around Bar Vaima and I sometimes ask him to sit with me and tell me about Tahiti, just so I can hear the music of the unknown tongue. He knows that he is not understood by *popaas* and so he employs a sign language consisting of only one sign. He holds his right hand out in front of his chest with the fingers pointed straight down and then he makes a circular, stirring motion. This serves to illustrate every topic he talks about and is fully as incomprehensible as his conversation. If he were older I would judge him to be another natural son of Paul Gauguin.

December 24

NELLE SAID at breakfast this morning: "Let's see now, is today Christmas, or is it tomorrow?" Who would have ever dreamed, a year ago, that . . .

I went for a swim in the pool after breakfast, a thing I don't do often because of the litter that accumulates on the water. Now I was lolling and splashing around when I happened to notice the character of that litter. It is composed mostly of gardenia blossoms, and a few flowers blown off the nearby white ginger plant, and I thought, my God, people in Mexico drive two hundred miles over dangerous mountain roads to Fortin de las Flores and pay good money to swim in a pool with gardenias floating on the surface, and here I've got the same thing *aw naturel*, if I may be so bold as to say so.

Later we drove down to the *Wanderlure* and I gave Carl Heintz some notes I have accumulated about little Norfolk Island, which lies off the east coast of Australia and which is to me what the Seychelles are to him. Many people have their own private dream island, a place they plan to visit before they die, and Norfolk is mine. I am unable to explain why it attracts me, but it does. I know an architect who yearns to visit the island of Dek which is in Lake Tana in Africa. Dek is eight miles long and four miles wide and my architect friend has a great urge to see it and stand upon its soil. One evening at my house he got a bit drunk and grew so emotional about Dek that he wept. I can remember that I tried to soothe him by patting him on the back and saying, "God dammit, Harry, why don't you just drop everything and go!" I am hoping that later on, before leaving the South Pacific, I'll be able to make it to Norfolk. I have read everything I can get my hands on respecting its physical aspect and its famous pine trees and its somersetmaughamish administrators who say "Bugger you, Jack!" and its people who are descended from the Bounty mutineers. And I've talked about it so much lately that now Carl Heintz has developed an interest and says he'll try to put in at Norfolk after he leaves Samoa.

From the *Wanderlure* we drove out to Mataiea district to visit Baldwin Bambridge in his back-to-nature house. We found Baldwin with a seventeen-year-old Tahitian girl named Noeline, who is either his sixth wife or a candidate for that honor. Noeline's family lives near Baldwin's bamboo cottage and she is an attractive little girl with nice features and a splendid body; her skin, however, is a bit blotchy and she has a habit of picking her nose. Baldwin felt that there was a need for explanation of his relationship with Noeline, that we as Americans would not understand it and might even be a little shocked. He said that he and Noeline were simply carrying on in The Tahitian Way. We

assured him that we thought The Tahitian Way was just fine and I even said that I would like to indulge in it just a trifle. Nelle said shut up or I will give you some Tahitian Way right between the eyes.

Baldwin had me move the Dauphine for I had parked it under a coconut tree and he explained that coconuts are as heavy and as fast-moving as cannon balls and can do serious damage to the top of a car. I asked him if, with cannon-ball coconuts dropping all over the island, anybody ever gets hit in the head and killed. Never, he said. He could remember only one man who was ever hit by a falling coconut. "It only stunted him," said Baldwin.

We went over to the home of Noeline's parents, a sprawling establishment consisting mainly of a thatched house with a cook shack nearby and some chicken pens. The girl's father is a fisherman and a grower of taro root and at fifty-five is the father of twelve children, seven of whom live at home. We were invited into the house where the mother was hastily putting on a shirt — she had been naked to the waist when we arrived. The main house consisted of one big room with five beds standing around the walls, each with clean white sheets and tents of mosquito netting suspended overhead. We adults sat down in a circle and the younger kids, naked or wearing only a shirt, stood around staring at us. I noticed that there were several prayer books and Bibles in the room, and some shell necklaces draped over the furniture, and an old family photograph on the wall. Everything had the look of decay except the floor, which was solid concrete and lent an air of stability to the place.

Baldwin told us that all these people live in The Tahitian Way and he pointed toward an older girl who was sitting on one of the beds and who was pregnant. "She has been away with Tahitian man," said Baldwin, "and now she has come home to have a baby because mama knows how to do. Nobody minds. Maybe she will not go back to the man. You must understand The Tahitian Way. The chiefs of each district, they are the real boss, they are the policeman, the court, the clerk, the mailman, everything. They keep records of those who are born and die and I have looked at these records. They say the name of the mother and it will be Nelle Smit and then the name of the father and it will be Rape by French Sailor. Ha! Some name for a father, huh? Mister Rape by French Sailor. A joke. You get it?"

I realized suddenly that it was Christmas Eve and I asked what plans they had for the holiday. They had none. The father said, and Baldwin translated: "We are happy because we have enough to eat." I wanted to know what all the little children would have for Christmas and he said the pastor of the district church had arranged to have Le Truck take the children all the way around the island the day after Christmas. Baldwin explained, with some bitterness, that most of the

adults who normally use the bus would be drunk and immobilized on that day, and the buses would be available for giving the children an outing.

They showed us the cookhouse before we left, with its rock-lined pit, and the saw-toothed gadget that is used in the important work of shredding coconut meat, and under the thatch roof their proudest possession — a shiny new power mower. Baldwin said that these people would give us anything we asked for, including their chickens and their children, but that they would never part with that red-and-white power mower. Apparently it is a status symbol — there isn't any real need for it.

Baldwin now drove us to the Chinese restaurant, Atchoun's, out near the isthmus, and we had food of questionable quality. It was miserable. Bones and gristle surrounded by rice. The same as it is in the other Chinese restaurants of Tahiti. Baldwin and Noeline ate nothing but Chinese vegetables and drank nothing but cherry pop. Baldwin said that before he marries a girl in The Tahitian Way, she has to promise that she will never eat meat or drink alcohol during the time she is his *vahine*.

An annex to Atchoun's restaurant contains pool tables and all of them were being used today, with much drinking of beer by the players, and a couple of guitars going on the sidelines. Baldwin spoke of the Tahitian love for music and said that the most popular instruments are the guitar, the accordion and drums. He, a musician, believes that music can solve all human problems, that a person who sings and plays an instrument will always be happy and shorn of care and worry. Being a polite person I didn't say so, but that is a lot of bologna.

Baldwin also spent some time cussing out liquor. Then the name of a well-known Tahitian woman came into the conversation and I said that I had heard she was sick and in trouble, with a long history of heavy drinking. Said Baldwin grimly: "She ripped what she saw."

We drove back to Mataiea, where the people look upon Baldwin as a sort of king, and stopped at the *baraque* that have been erected for the holiday celebrations. Each district builds such *baraque*, pronounced barracks, whenever there is occasion for celebration. They are large pavilions made of bamboo or coconut wood framework and thatched with green pandanus and coconut leaves with flowers added here and there. Inside are rude tables for eating and beer-drinking and a bandstand, and a floor for dancing. Every holiday, Christmas included, is observed in the same way, with eating and drinking and dancing, and usually there is a wheel-of-fortune by which suckling pigs and pareus are raffled off. Baldwin is a sort of benefactor to the entire district and he also is leader of the dance band. I had asked him

earlier about Tahitian cattle ranches and cowhands, and now he was able to produce a real South Seas cowboy. I must explain that the natives of Tahiti are wild about cowboy movies and many of them consider Roy Rogers to be far and away the greatest man who ever trod earth. So now Baldwin introduced me to a young fellow who is a hero to the people of the district because he is, without question, a true cowboy. He was slim, quite handsome with a shock of roached black hair that would qualify him for membership in the teen-age crowds back home. There was no suggestion of the Wild West in his attire — he had on a Tahitian shirt and an old pair of pants and a pair of go-aheads. I asked his name and had to have it spelled out for me: Theophile Toofa. I made a mental note of the possibility that he'd have to change his name if he ever made it to Hollywood and became a film cowboy. Or maybe not. Maybe a fast gun by the name of Theophile Toofa would go well in pictures. I offered to buy him a bottle of beer and he went to the bar and got it. A quart. Then I told him that I had read that Tahitian cowboys ride the range barefooted and with flowers in their hair. Theophile said it is not true, that he and his cowboy friends wear Western boots and sombreros when they are working. He was proud of the fact that he had been singled out for an interview and was grave and dignified in his responses when I asked if he was bothered by rustlers or if hired guns were a problem to him.

"We are too small," he said. "Our herd is only seventy. Some day we hope to have two hundred and seventy."

Theophile is ramrod of a spread of 270 hectares, owned by Baldwin's cousin Rudy Bambridge, who is a prominent lawyer and horseman. This Mataiea cowboy is twenty-six years old and when I asked if he is married he replied that he has five girls to sleep with. "He has five wives The Tahitian Way," Baldwin explained. Theophile doesn't carry a six-gun but often has a rifle with him on the range and uses it to shoot wild duck. He has three men working under him and they butcher as well as herd cattle. I asked him what kind of pasture is available to his herd. He said there are assorted grasses but the cows eat beaucoup bananas. This fruit is plentiful on the ranch, actually going to waste, and since the cows seem to love bananas, they are allowed to eat them as much as they want. They also graze on mangoes and breadfruit, although the breadfruit has to be chopped up for them.

Out of this interview with Theophile Toofa came a constructive thought. If Mr. Rudy Bambridge can get his beef to the American market, the advertising agencies might have a great time playing around with such lines as: **Prime Steaks from Banana-Fed Cows.**

As the cowboy and I sat talking I noticed a pitch game in progress

in a nearby banana-leaf shed. A pyramid of tin cans was set up on a plank and the contestants paid five francs for the privilege of trying to knock them down with a dozen rag balls. The balls were nothing more than hunks of blue-and-white pareu cloth — the same cloth that was designed in England by William Morris. Noeline asked Baldwin if she could play the game and we all walked over and took our turns firing at the cans. Noeline was good, and won a prize — a jelly glass. While we were admiring the prize a Tahitian girl about the same age as Noeline sauntered up to the shed, casually picked up a rag ball and let fly, and the tin cans went clattering over the ground. They were set up again and the girl wound up and cleared the board with a single shot. I'd hate to have that girl throwing rocks at me. She had speed and she had control and for all I know she may have had an effective change-up. We were all watching her and I was impressed by her beauty — she bore a strong resemblance to the Joan Bennett of twenty-five years ago and her tan skin was unblemished. Her loose-fitting cotton dress was faded and a bit frayed but that merely made her seem the more attractive. Inside the dress was something quite spectacular in the way of body. I came to a decision. This would be my Tahitian girl, my *vahine*. Adequate. Quite satisfactory. I moved up to the counter and picked up some balls and we were standing elbow to elbow. I turned to look at her, admiringly, and she was looking me straight in the eye. And she was giggling. I have been told that this is a sign of a fervent and deep-seated passion among Tahitian girls. A steady giggling that seems to have a few hiccups mixed in with it means that a Tahitian babe is ready for action. Her hair was down her back to her waist in two braids, and it was as black as a yard and a half down a shark's throat. I felt an explosive, volcanic heat rising within me, the same as those guys in that hook *The Carpetbaggers*. I gazed steadily into her eyes, and she flashed a provocative smile. I suppose provocative is the word. I was provoked. Back of those lovely luscious lips were a few back teeth but none at all in front. In an instant she turned from a desirable, sensuous sex wagon into a crone. And in the same instant I abandoned all thought of becoming a dissolute beachcomber and resigned myself to continuing years of piddling around my vegetable garden and watching Buddy Nature Boy Rogers on TV.

And so we returned to Baldwin's bamboo shack in the coconut grove and the maestro retired for a nap against the long night of music-making that lay ahead of him. Nelle and I got into swim clothes and went to the black sand beach. The shore had a deserted, primeval look for as far as the eye could see, as if nobody had set foot on it for centuries. There were remnants of old coconuts, and driftwood in grotesque shapes, the gnarled and misshapen stuff that is

sometimes carved up and made into living-room pieces. There was a tropic mustiness, the smell of jungle decay. A misty rain was blowing off Little Tahiti's towering, soft-green slopes, and suddenly a rainbow flung itself across the landscape, sharp and dear, seeming to link the two islands more securely than the Isthmus of Taravao, and ... git out th' way, Ole Donald Culross Peattie! I'm takin' over!

We returned to the bamboo house in time to see Noeline's mama coming through the palm trees bearing Christmas gifts for the *popaas*. There was a cardboard carton filled with fruit — two kinds of bananas, mangoes, papaya, and some others I didn't recognize. Then an ingenious package made of tightly-fitted banana leaves, formed into a leak-proof carrying container held together by sennit, and inside a quart or more of a purplish pudding, resembling Jello. I judged this to be a variety of the Tahitian *poe* which I've read about and which is said to be not only edible but tasty and flavored with bananas, as against the Hawaiian *poi* which is famous the world over for being ghastly. We carried the gifts home with us and the fruit was useful. I was puddin'-shy about the purple stuff and gave it to the hired girls.

As we drove home we took a turn along the waterfront. The only evidence that it was Christmas Eve was the six-foot lighted tree which had been raised to the top of the *Wanderlure's* mast. Below it there were lights and noise, for the Heintzes were having an eggnog party. We stopped in for a few moments, and on the deck ran into a young man from Alabama who is in the *Wanderlure's* crew. Nelle glanced at the lighted tree high overhead and said to this Secesh boy, "How on earth did you ever get it up there?" And he replied: "Drug 'er up with two hawgs and a mule."

And so we settled down at home to read a while, and to talk about the incredible beauty of the Tahitian land and sea, or those portions of it we had traveled through today. Christmas Eve in Paradise . . . and we were asleep soon after ten o'clock.

December 25

LAY LATE in bed and it was six o'clock before I got to the kitchen and made us some breakfast of pamplemousse grown on the premises. An hour later, with the sun shining brilliantly, it began to rain — the fine, misty sort of rain called angel's tears, that brings out the perfume in all the flowers. Henryetta arrived bearing a load of Christmas food from Louise's kitchen — sliced turkey with truffles, great juicy succulent chunks of baby pig, and beautiful sliced tomatoes. I was sampling the pig when I heard a commotion on the terrace. The black cat was closing in on a young pigeon, already crippled and unable to fly. I chased the cat away and captured the pigeon and then had the problem of finding a safe place to put it. In the end I put it on the roof with the vague notion that it might be able to fly later on, or its folks might come and get it. It just sat up there staring at me. I threw a piece of coconut bread up, but the bird ignored it. So we got in the car and drove out to take some "Christmas in Tahiti" color pictures at Point Venus and One Tree Hill and Bill Stone's house and through town to the top of the Route de Maraichers.

The waterfront was almost deserted but we ran into a couple of men we knew, men around sixty years of age, and they gave us a hearty Merry Christmas and then one of them said he had heard I am in possession of certain magic potions that are highly effective in you-know-what, and that he would greatly enjoy having the recipe for same. The second man said that he, too, had heard all about it, but that he wasn't interested in any quack medicines — he had his own formula for you-know-what. He said he eats two liters of peanuts a day and that does the trick. His friend now asked me if I would write out the name of the stuff for him and I was tempted to give him a lift, but I am an honorable man and I kept my promise, at the same time cursing that cockatrice Rynar for telling every *old* son of a bitch and his brother. Everybody in Tahiti now knows that I have the medicine and what makes me sore is that everybody thinks I am taking it. And I am. I have been taking the pills and the black tonic, sawing off those little glass tits till my fingers ache, and this has been going on for nine days, three hours and fourteen minutes, and nothing out of the ordinary has happened to me. I can't imagine what the people of Tahiti are actually thinking. I haven't seen any of the town's matrons crossing the street when they see me approaching.

We had Christmas dinner with Ralph Varady and, knowing that I am going to Bora Bora tomorrow, he told me some of the romantic traditions of that tropic isle. During the war more than twenty thousand American troops were stationed there and many more

thousands passed through. After they had all gone home a census was taken and there were 126 babies whose fathers were American. Forty per cent of these died before reaching their teens. They had been started off in life with good milk and wholesome bread and ample vitamins and other salubrious things from the PX. After the troops left these children were switched onto the traditional diet of the natives, including much raw fish and breadfruit. As a consequence, many of them sickened and died, and it is unlikely that their fathers ever heard about it. Or cared.

December 26

TOMORROW MORNING the island of Bora Bora will get its first look at a Matson cruise ship. The *Monterey*, sister ship to the *Mariposa*, will drop anchor in the lagoon there and the passengers will be hauled ashore for a big Polynesian debauch.

Baldwin Bambridge and I made it to the Tahiti airport early this afternoon and Baldwin, who is impresario of the whole operation, was swept into a series of conferences with various officials and *fonctionnaires*. There at the airport I had my first close look at Thousand Franc Colette. She is truly a stunning woman, of French-Polynesian extraction and possessed of the same kind of sex wallop as those Italian movie actresses. Her nickname derives from an earlier period of her life but it is still used, even though she has graduated to better things. Today she wouldn't run her fingers through a man's hair for a thousand francs (about twelve dollars). She plays house now for much higher stakes and her dresses are stitched up by Balenciaga. She was with a gentleman, seeing him off for Bora Bora, and they were having coffee at the bar. As I stared at Thousand Franc, I couldn't help but think of the tender, romantic adventure story that is told about her.

Some years ago she was married to a handsome officer on a cruise ship, a man who did relief duty and therefore was able to spend much time at home in Tahiti, enfeebling himself in the company of Colette. Nonetheless there were long weeks at sea and eventually he got wind of the fact that Colette was not exactly holding still in his absence. Now, this ship's officer had a close friend who was a member of the gendarmerie in Papeete and one day, just before his departure on a cruise, he went to this gendarme and asked a great favor of him. "My Colette," he said, "is shacking around with some guy. As you know, I fain must have two witnesses in order to prove adultery and thereby obtain a divorce. I wish that you, my friend, would tail her, so to speak, and track her down with this man, whoever he is, and take along one of your compatriots as the second witness, and flagrante-delicto the behind off of her."

It was agreed and the husband sailed away to other isles and the gendarme began his tailing. One evening he heard that Colette had been seen entering Bungalow Eight at a certain hotel, and so he summoned one of his fellow gendarmes and they went to the place. They crept up the steps of Bungalow Eight and paused, and heard interesting noises within, and then they tippy-toed across the little veranda in a most expert and professional way, and they kicked open the door, at the same time turning a flashlight beam full on the bed.

There lay Colette and there lay her startled lover. The gendarmes were prepared to cry out dramatically, "Aha! We have caught you in the act!" But they did no such thing. Instead, both of them stiffened and came to full salute, for the gentleman in the bed was the Commandant of the Gendarmerie, their own beloved chieftain.

It was another year before the ship's officer was able to get his divorce.

Also at the airport I had Baldwin point out for me the son of Edgar Leeteg, the picaresque and crapulous painter on black velvet. The son is a handsome young man with black curly hair and works as a baggage porter and roustabout at the airport. People say he looks like his famous father. He rode the launch with us out to the flying boat anchored in the lagoon, but I didn't get a chance to talk with him. The transfer from launch to seaplane was an adventure. The launch bobbed up and down energetically as the people climbed off it and entered a small doorway into the plane. Two men stood just inside this doorway. One reached out and seized each passenger by the arm and hauled him in. The other was a head-depressor. He reached out and placed his hand on top of the passenger's head and pressed it downward, so it would not connect with the top of the plane's doorway, thus fracturing the skull. This was my first experience on a flying boat and I thought the takeoff was rough, or at least it sounded rough as the hull banged against the waves in the lagoon. But the flight itself was smooth and a chubby blonde hostess with fat legs and a big behind passed hard candies in a plate and later served soft drinks and pineapple juice.

We stopped briefly at Raiatea and then set down in the lagoon opposite the village of Vaitape which is the principal settlement of Bora Bora. Some people think the lagoons here contain the most beautiful water to be seen on earth, and that Bora Bora is the loveliest of all islands. Another launch carried us to a long pier and a few sheds filled with bustling island people and tables loaded with souvenirs. Bora Bora's entire population numbers no more than five hundred and Vaitape is what you might call the capital city, but you would never know you were in a town at all. Nothing. One street, maybe a church, and a few drinking spots stuck away in the jungle growth.

Inside the biggest shed there was much milling about, with Baldwin in his full glory as chief of operations, overall boss of the fete. I was wandering around the shed when my eye fell on a girl in a white linen dress, with shoulder-length auburn hair, a tiare Tahiti blossom back of her ear — a clean and handsome babe with a lovely build, clearly an American. After all the flat-nosed, sore-legged Tahitian stuff I've been looking at through the month of December (not

counting Thousand Franc Colette) this girl was like a breath of spring. My God she looked good! I hadn't realized how beautiful an American girl can be.

We rode Le Truck with its wooden benches from the pier to the hotel, three or four miles away. An elderly lady sat opposite me in the bus and as we bounced and jostled along, she was telling some other people about her personal tragedy, involving the loss of her luggage, and I resolved to corner her and talk to her later at the hotel.

The Hotel Bora Bora is a luxury resort and charges luxury prices. It costs about forty dollars a night for a couple, American plan. I went into the bar on arrival and the girl in the white linen dress was there. I struck up a conversation with her. She said she was originally from DeQueen, Arkansas, and I said that I had been there and knew about the local newspaper called *DeQueen Bee*. Rapport established.

Now she told me she was in Bora Bora with her husband, a French-Tahitian, and that they live on Raiatea. She asked me what I was doing out here and I told her I was spending three months in Tahiti for the purpose of writing a book about the island. She said that was impossible. She said I would have to live among the natives for a long time if I ever expected to write such a book. Eight or ten years, maybe. She said I was down "raht" silly to think I could do it in three months. I tried to argue with her, and tell her that I had made it before with England and Mexico and Hawaii, but she went right on nagging away at me so I said I had to see a man about a music lesson and broke away from her. She was a true-blue American girl all right, a take-charge kid, and I thought her teeth were crooked and her bite bad and that she could have done with a little underarm daintiness.

So I sat down with the elderly lady of Le Truck. She was a retired high-school teacher from a small town near San Francisco. When she found out that I was a writer she told me that she had taught high-school journalism for years, and that she was proud to say that she had turned out quite a few young people who had gone places. I asked for the names of some of them. "Well," she said, "the one that did the best, I think, was Margaret Gillies." I asked where Margaret had made her mark. "She married a rich real estate man," said the former teacher. "Some said he was a millionaire."

This lady, now past seventy, had saved and skimped for years with one ambition — to travel all the way around the world. At last she was ready, with all her tickets and reservations and inoculations and documents and so on. She planned her wardrobe carefully, so that she could get it all into one big fold-up type of bag. Came the great day of departure and she went into San Francisco and flew down to Los Angeles to catch the jet for Tahiti. And there, on the very first day of her Great Journey, the airplane people lost her big bag. She refused

to stay behind and look for it. "By dam and doggone it," she told me, "I had dreamed about this trip for twenty years and I was not going to let a lost bag stop me now. They said it would probably catch up with me, but I'm going around the world if I have to do it with nothing but my wallet. I've got this big handbag and I bought a sort of knapsack. The Air France people in Tahiti gave me two thousand francs to buy some clothes, but I couldn't get much for that — it comes to about twenty-four dollars. It's no fun to travel without a wardrobe, but I'm going right on, regardless of hell or high water, if you'll excuse me."

I had her as my guest for dinner and we sat for a while outside, looking at the beautiful lagoon and at the sky, which was crowded with more stars than I've ever seen in my life. Later I met a nice-looking youngish man who said he was a farmer in North Dakota. At first he was bashful but after a while he warmed up and told me that fourteen years ago he visited Hawaii and liked it so well that he decided to see more of the Pacific, and so he saved and skimped. He is a bachelor and lives alone on his farm and it was a problem to take time off for a trip to Tahiti and Bora Bora. He solved it by selling off his stock and arranging for his brother to look in at his place periodically. In the hotel bar an impromptu entertainment had developed, with guitar music and a bongo drum and young people singing native songs. They did real well with the song "Now is the Hour," which is heard frequently in these latitudes, it being a Maori song out of New Zealand. There were not many guests in the hotel but the bar was crowded with natives and they were all drinking and having a fine time. After a while a brown-skinned gal in a pareu got off the floor where she had been sitting, the music grew louder and faster, and she went into a sensuous hula. She had a red sash tied around her bottom to accentuate the concentration of speed and power residing in that area, and she was giving it her all when an Australian tourist, a young man I had seen on the flying boat, swept up to her and launched himself into the male part of the act. He was good, he knew what he was doing, and the two of them proceeded to tell the folk history of Bora Bora with their heads thrown back, their teeth grinding, and expressions of wild ecstasy on their faces. This type of folklore, with boy and girl facing each other, almost but not quite touching, can stagger the imagination. I have read recently that in years gone by, in Tahiti, several couples would be dancing in this fashion and they would reach such a frenzy that they would stop, dash off into the bushes, complete that movement of the choreography, and then come back and finish somewhat lazily on their feet. There were even occasions when, in the presence of the Royal Court, a couple would perform the whole business without going into the bushes, while kings and queens and princes and princesses writhed and

flopped around and screamed their delight. To a Tahitian, those were the Good Old Days. I have not seen such a dance but I would be willing to look at one in the interests of truth and travel-hook accuracy. I must say that the Australian and the tan gal came mighty close to the nuptial flight before they were finished.

December 27

UP AT SIX and walked down to the lagoon where crowds of Bora Bora people were already at work against the coming of the *Monterey*. Big ships don't often put in at Bora Bora and I've been told that the arrival of the *Monterey* is the biggest local event since the end of the war. Several *baraque*, one of them at least a block long, were being erected by quick-moving natives and the famous Bora Bora dancers were rehearsing on the turf nearby. I wandered around the *baraque* where Polynesian girls were sitting on the ground stripping pandanus fronds which would be used all around the structures as a sort of decorative fringe. Other women were fetching armloads of flowers and ferns and the men were putting the final touches on the bamboo framework and still another group was working at the pits where the pigs and sweet potatoes and fish and bananas would soon be cooking. I listened to the workmen talking excitedly to one another as they hammered and sawed on the long structure that would serve as the dining pavilion. I wanted to find some describable pattern in their talk, so I could reproduce the sounds in print, but it all adds up to community grunting, with lots of uh-uh-uhs and oh-oh-uhs and ah-ah-uhs, the same as in Tahiti.

Over all the frenzied preparations sounded the beat of the drums, the peculiar rhythms of the Polynesians with their pistol-shot endings, being played for the thirty-odd dancers who were wriggling and jerking and vibrating their behinds in cotton dresses and pareus and slacks. The crowd was increasing with every minute and Alec Bourgerie, a native of Brooklyn who is manager of the hotel, said that every single resident of the island, including the lame and the feeble, would be on the grounds by the time the big white American ship comes in view. I looked at the swarms of natives and concluded that if a coconut fell it would surely knock somebody to the ground. And I remembered something Ralph Varady told me — that I should take special note of the teenagers among the natives, the boys and girls just under twenty. I did, and I saw several who were blond and one or two redheads, all with skin lighter than their companions. These were the offspring of the long-gone American servicemen.

A few years ago an American newspaperman with a widely syndicated column came to Bora Bora and saw the children who were begotten during the war and saw, too, that they were not leading lives of luxury, and so he had an idea. In his column he appealed to the parents of all servicemen who were in the Pacific and who might have been on Bora Bora at one time or another. He spoke frankly to these

older people. He told them that it might very well be that they had a grandchild on this remote island — flesh of their flesh. There would be no way of knowing definitely, but if their boy had been on Bora Bora there was a chance that he left a baby behind. And so this columnist said to the parents, send him a small cash contribution and he would assemble a fund and it would be used to make life a little better for those kids.

The response, I have heard, was tremendous. The money poured in and thousands and thousands of dollars accumulated. The columnist wanted no part of administering this fund. He sent word to the French authorities in Papeete that he had all this money for the Bora Bora children and that he was prepared to hand it over to the government to use as it saw fit. The French replied with a sharply worded letter telling him that the people of French Polynesia want no charity from Americans and that he could take the money and shove it. I don't know what eventually happened to the fund, but I'm sure it wasn't shoved. One thing I do know. The French *fonctionnaires* were real slow-witted in this matter. They could have accepted the money graciously, and then kept it for themselves. That's the way a lot of people in government do it.

By half-past ten this morning the work had all been finished and the dancers were in their splendid costumes and a hush fell over the island, for it was time. The North Dakota farmer and I went out to the end of the hotel's pier. When the white nose of the *Monterey* pushed through the reef and came in view, I had thought there would be some cheering and gibble-gabble, but not a sound came from the crowd. The customs of the Polynesians are often quite different from our own. When they wave bye-bye they are saying, "Come here."

Within the lagoon dozens of the island's famous sailing outriggers surrounded the big ship as she moved to an anchorage midway between the hotel and the village of Vaitape. Launches began to take the passengers off and haul them down to the hotel pier; later members of the crew would be taken to the village where they could celebrate a bit.

The North Dakota farmer and I watched the passengers come ashore. They were *so old*. Some were bent and crippled, and some had to be led, and they were wearing the most outlandish costumes. The saddest thing of all was the way they tried to pretend to a friskiness they didn't really possess, hopping about on their feeble legs, trying to perform little jig steps on the pier, croaking out their stale wisecracks. My friend the farmer looked at them straggling by and then said, "Why, these people all ought to be home setting before the fire."

By now the sun was beating down and it was as hot as the middle pastures of hell. The dancers were going, kicking up the dust, and

people were herding the bewildered passengers into the enclosure before the *baraque*. The rum punch was flowing and the old folks were guzzling away and soon the men began digging up the pigs and fish and sweet potatoes. I hung around a while and noted that the Bora Bora natives were assembled in a great semicircle, silently staring at the tourists. To them this was the same as a circus. This was the reason they had left their grass shacks and their little stores and their taro patches and come to spend the day looking at the visitors, and listening to the strange noises they made, and observing their civilized kookery.

I went out to the road and found a man with a truck-bus and hired him to drive me to the village. I decided that I would go back to Vaitape and have my fun with the crew.

And so we started up the hot and dusty road and all along the way we met little groups of men and women, straggling through the dust, and they all begged us to stop and take them on board. We loaded them into the bus, as many as we had room for, and they were saying, "Where is everybody? What the hell has happened to the people?" These were members of the crew. They had been hauled ashore at Vaitape and they had gone looking for saloons and restaurants and they couldn't find anybody. Not a soul. They were hot and thirsty and hungry and desperate. None of them had ever been to Bora Bora before, and they had no idea where the hotel was located, and so they were just wandering around in Paradise, trying to find civilization — a place to get a drink.

We turned around and hauled them to the party at the hotel and then the driver and I went back to the village and the same thing happened, we acquired another load of crew members, and took them to the hotel, and tried it again, and got still another truckful. We were taking on half a dozen people near the village pier and I was sitting next to the driver when a huge fat man came alongside and said to me, "Move over." Something caused me to turn on him. I almost yelled: "Listen, you big slob, don't tell me to move over! Don't try to push *me*! This is my truck, I hired it, and you can walk." He was immediately contrite, and apologized, saying he thought it was a public bus, and so I moved over and tried to make room for him—he was really a big one. He turned out to be a man I had heard about, Tiny Berg, leader of the dance band on the *Monterey*, a terrific hand with the clarinet and sax and one of the most popular Americans roving the South Pacific.

Up at the *baraque* at least one old lady had passed out from the heat and was being fanned by relays of native girls, and quite a few of the rum drinkers were bobbing and weaving. I ran my private bus back and forth, gathering up Tiny Berg and the other crew members,

and we all made it aboard the launch. By now Tiny and I had become pals and on the *Monterey* we stationed ourselves near the purser's office, next to the doorway where the passengers would enter after being helped through the port and up an iron stairway. They were a sorry-looking lot by now. All of them spoke to Tiny by name, and most of them were groaning, and they said the food hadn't been fit to eat, and the entire expedition was a mistake, and they were going to bed and not get up for three days, and they hoped he hadn't been fool enough to go ashore. This was their reaction to Bora Bora the Unexcelled, loveliest island in the whole wide world. The North Dakota farmer was right.

Tonight on board the *Monterey*, cruising toward Tahiti, I thought about that modern hotel that has come into being on Bora Bora in the last year. Soon there will be others, and eventually a supermarket and electric refrigerators and electric shavers and deep-breeze units and stucco houses and the island with its noble crags and lush vegetation will become a playground for wealthy Americans and Australians and people fleeing from overcrowded Tahiti. And all the other idyllic islands of the South Pacific will go the same way and in the end there will be no island to call Paradise — no true South Sea Island. What will happen then? I think I know. American enterprise will go quickly to work. A corporation will be formed. Somewhere in the correct latitudes an island will be created out of coral chunks and volcanic rock. The horticulturists will move in and man-made jungles will spring into being, full of parakeets and fairy terns and all the vast garden of tropical foliage and fruits, and a hundred thousand rotten mangoes will be scattered over the ground — the *ambiance* must be precisely right. And there will be tiny villages of thatched houses, and down from Hawaii will come the glorious tawny-skinned girls with white pearly teeth, trained in the paint-shaker hula, trained in the rites of love. If I happen to be on the board of directors I will arrange it so these girls will go about stripped to the waist. That is a nice way for girls to go about. And there will be lithe but muscular young men with coal-black curly hair and big solemn eyes and regular features and these boys will sail the outriggers and the catamarans, and there will be konketty-konk drums a-going on every hand, and buried pig to eat, and a church or two with red and white steeples just for decoration. The corporation will bring in a contingent of skilled beachcombers and nature men, all with whiskers, and they will live among the imported natives and eat with their fingers and gulp booze and catch the clap. And then will come the shiploads of tourists, for this will be the last surviving authentic Paradise Island of the storied South Seas — and there will be brown beach boys (known as Long Pig) for all the ladies and a lovely gal with ball-bearings in her

midsection for every man. I tell you, there is nothing that American enterprise can't do.

December 28

I WAS on deck before six this morning and as we came through the pass I looked at the curve of the waterfront, lying there in the soft morning light, and I knew that I could live out the rest of my days here and enjoy every minute of it. That's the way I felt for a little while and then I reflected on it, and came up against that one big stumbling block: I cannot abide red tape in any form, and there is always red tape when you live under a foreign flag, and from what I hear the French bureaucrats of Tahiti take lessons from nobody.

My good wife was at the ship to meet me and to advise me that breakfast was on the stove at Maison Louise. She didn't go to Bora Bora, having been under the impression that I wanted to make the trip without her. A real silly notion on her part, considering that she was right.

This afternoon I picked up Tiny Berg at Bar Vaima and hauled him out to our house and we spent the afternoon drinking beer on the terrace. Tiny's arrival in Papeete every six weeks is a great event, for it is his custom to sit in with his clarinet at Quinn's. This is the dancingest town on earth but they say that when Tiny rises up and lets go with *Stardust* on his clarinet all movement ceases in Quinn's and the people just stand and listen. He was born in Dodge City and grew up in the San Fernando Valley and has been a musician since high school days. Years ago he was a singer with the dance bands. What type of singing? "Raspy like Louie," he said. He has been on the Matson ships for four years, playing two-beat stuff always, never anything new except maybe show tunes. The middle-aged and the oldsters always demand, "Play us the songs we know." We talked about musicians of the jazz combos and dance bands — surely one of the strangest peoples of earth. Tiny told about a drummer with whom he worked in the pit of the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco. This drummer went out one night with one of the vaudeville performers, a man who had an act involving a dozen acrobatic dogs. The drummer and the dog man were drinking at a bar and got into an argument about Buddy Rich and fists were thrown and the drummer's nose was bloodied. The next evening when the enemy was on stage with his dogs, the drummer quietly picked up a package containing two pounds of raw hamburger. He began tossing little meat balls onto the stage. The dogs went nuts. They ignored the commands of their master, paid no heed to him as he grew shrill and hysterical, but concentrated on the meat balls, and the drummer in the pit just doubled up with glee.

Tiny also told a story about a tourist who heard that in Tahiti there

was a Chinese tailor who could make an absolutely exact copy of any garment that was brought to him. This tourist had a suit that he favored and so he took it to the Chinese tailor and impressed upon him, in strong language, that he wanted the copy to be exact in every detail. And so on the appointed day he went to pick up his suit and found that the tailor had made a perfect copy, including a cigarette hole burned in the fabric just below the breast pocket.

Our friends the Scofields, who came out with us on the *Mariposa*, are sailing away again on the *Monterey* and we had dinner with them on board tonight, along with their friends the Shipleys, Shipley being an American Airlines jet pilot who is thinking about retiring to Tahiti. I started to tell the Chinese tailor story but Shipley said he heard it ten years ago on Wake Island and the locale was not Tahiti but Hong Kong.

Tourists are swarming over Papeete with extra planes arriving and three big cruise ships in port. Also there are some fine new homosexual specimens flouncing around the waterfront. Nelle and I encountered a bewitching pair near Aline's store this afternoon. They were in tight slacks and soft shirts and one had gossamer red hair, fluffed out ethereal-like, the way Billie Burke used to wear it. I came face to face with this creature and I am sorry to report that I misbehaved. I have not been conditioned to accept these people as a normal part of life; I have, in fact, an old-fashioned Midwestern attitude about them, and I think they are often hilariously comical. So here I was, looking straight into this girl-boy face with its heavy eye makeup and lip rouge, and I couldn't hold back — I simply burst out laughing. It didn't like it. It stuck out its tongue at me and went mincing off.

December 29

THE KRAFTS of Honolulu, having heard me talk of building a homemade barbecue grill, have sent a dandy Japanese hibachi down by air freight. I gave it a try today with steaks from Aline's. The fire was so hot that it scorched the wooden handles of the hibachi and the steaks had a juicy and succulent look. By the time I got them to the table they were top-grain leather. The French paring knife, which looks like a dagger, was inadequate and just barely made a dent in the meat.

I have finished James Norman Hall's autobiography and I suspect that he must have been working on it at the time of his final illness for it has the appearance of being part of a first draft. From its pages I judge that Hall came to the South Pacific because he was bashful; he always had trouble meeting people and he wanted to live in a place where there was a minimum of social activity. There is one chapter in the book in which Hall sets down a long dialogue between himself and his collaborator, Charles Nordhoff. It is loaded with high-toned philosophical language, and during the talk Hall keeps going to his bookshelves and getting down books and reading bits of poetry and fragments of metaphysical sheep dip, possibly with the intention of illustrating a point, and the whole thing is unbelievably dull. I have known an immense passel of writers in my time and I never heard two of them get together and carry on the way Hall says he and Nordhoff did. I know the way writers talk. They say, that god damn Jimmie Houghton has hit the best-seller list, he couldn't write his way out of a paper bag, the dumb bastard, and looka the way Simon Schuster's splashin' the ads around — that son of a bitchin' louse publisher of mine, money-grubbin' prig, won't put out a thin dime for sensible advertisin' and far as I'm concerned he can kiss my foot. And they say . . . hey, Max, you see that babe I hired to type my manuscript? You keep your mother-loving hands offa her, see? That's the way writers talk.

Dear reader may recall that a few days back M. Charles Petras of *Les Nouvelles*, which is *Le Premier Quotidien de Tahiti*, interviewed me for his paper. The published interview, with photo, took up a page and a quarter of the daily journal and was in the French language. Being unable to read it, I thought of asking various people to translate it for me. Then I decided that would be looked upon as an act of gross vanity, and I am inherently modest and I was simply dying to know what Charles Petras had to say about me. So today I sat down and with the aid of a small French-English dictionary did my own

translation. I went at the thing carefully, word by word, and it took me half a day. If there's one thing I abhor it's a sloppy translation. Please keep in mind that the dictionary was a little one with many key words missing, though the lack of them doesn't seem to have affected the smooth flow of the prose as I rendered it out of French. I have not included the complete interview here, but only the pertinent paragraphs in which M. Petras captured the real me, the essential Smith (just as Chao Leon did it in Chinese) and in which, despite the language barrier, he plumbed the very depths of my personality and came up with an enduring portrait. For posterity.

I devote a good deal of space to the interview because it was regarded as an important event in Papeete. The day it was published I heard about it first when a boy from the Hotel Tahiti yelled at me on Rue Jeanne d'Arc, "I saw in newspaper today!" Many people stopped me on the street to remark about it, and there were phone calls of congratulation. Here then, in condensed form, is my translation:

Portrait d'un Humorists

It is delicate by talk of one humorist. Of approach because often it assumes (to drink?) his humor with serious, and it seriousness ill-advised by treat of in the manner of frivolous one subject so magnitude. And further part, it not serious hut little in putting no more to adopt a tone solemn for talk with a man who fully grown to joke with millions of readers.*

** French journalists have a hell of a time getting into their subject.*

H. Allen Smith, who in his 26 books about the subjects the most miscellaneous, beginning out of journalism. For him this first career take him to, by everything, the same in the fashion of fame, with status protruding out, he is to do afterwards to obtain interviews small and grand with the world crowd including Andre Maurois whom it is developed one friend.

He to have toil fifteen years on the Daily Press of Huntington within Indiana, afterwards on the World Telegram within New York. It is in the same environment journalistic that he collided his woman, one excellent reporter she the same, she accept with good willingly to wait on subject of famous humorist as husband, and to accompany it everywhere even to Tahiti. "For me to protect," she say, "of the temptation always present."

The tone of his reportings to have the talent not only of loosened interlocutor but also which make burst out laughing

the audience in which the readers, and it became rapidly one of reporters the more in great demand in States United.

From such a point, to note down one first book, there was but one step, to jump over with gaiety in telling the adventures of "Little man on one totem" which in 1940 do circulate on the America the inspiration of a brilliancy of laughter.

Allen Smith to have finish of the hard-working of the others. It takes for a walk across the States United for his own county personal, a glance sharp and penetrating always in the hiding-place of crazy, the failings of his contemporaries. Never with wretched nor cynicism, however. Allen Smith is gifted with such happy temperament which grasp everything, in which nearly, on pretext of to smile or laughter candidly. But never to throw the stone. And always with the, in addition, tall sincerity.

All the subjects were good to him, the travels of the basketball, the cat named Rhubarb and Mr. Zip, cowboy of cinema, with the history of the force-meat of lengthy centuries of those people who have the name Smith.

The cat Rhubarb remains for Allen Smith a souvenir which developed exclamations vile. His feline to have in the book inherited one squad of baseball which is without the manager. This is less improbable than looks because the circumstance not so rares of animals who inherit of fortunes enormous.

Out of the rife of the first hour, the two weeks in Tahiti became four, afterwards six, on to three months. Even now he not figure on housing scheme. "I remaining perhaps to exist here until she people obliged to escort me to aircraft between two gendarmes," said he guffaw at.

Tahiti, according him, deserves good better and many more than this once glance in style of tourist, agreed it on rapid sight. "I will write on Tahiti one book genuine. I think Nordhoff, Michener, Varady is good different. It would have been sufficient addition of two weeks of observations of persons for write an article valid. But it not me sufficient pace. I am loving with Tahiti, and if I talk faulty, such a new passion."

H. Allen Smith hit upon one very agreeable house nearby the Bill Stone encircled by a garden field of flowers and fruits. It is in the general district of the throwing (anchoring?) of expeditions which can also lead indeed to the Quinn's bar, but into the far end of the wilderness — the fates with him, to make a thorough knowledge of the genuine visage of one Tahiti.

It is then we could read of Allen Smith, breathe the enthusiasm, the gaiety, the indulgence, and the tall decent A man so much write on Tahiti with matters solemn, undeceived

wherefore using an expression gracious, haughtiness unlikely with his subject, treatise with humor, minus acrimony, such as without enthusiasm of visionary rottenness quite exist the book which the people await And, detail not negligible, the books of Allen Smith on the Mexico and the Islands Hawaii bring in these country many the tourists. It which pose a question mark:

Shall we yes or no let Allen Smith write his book?

Thus it ends, with a lyrical question. I have shown my translation to Charles Petras, who is bilingual and by no means of a visionary rottenness. His comment was: "I do believe that it loses a little in the translation."

I take issue with only one statement in the entire interview. It is suggested that when I began my career, my status was protruding out. If it was, I have no recollection of it.

December 30

ONE OF THE greater glories of life in Tahiti is provided by fat and wheezy M. Gaston. He is a peripatetic barber and I got onto him through Baldwin Bambridge. M. Gaston motorbikes around town all day long giving shaves and haircuts to business and professional men in their offices. He has a W. C. Fields face which never changes expression and a shock of reddish hair and he talks like the head in the box of Senor Wences, saying "All right! All right!" Accent and all.

Soon after our arrival in Tahiti I had my first haircut in a tiny Chinese barber shop near the public market. It was not a pleasant experience. The chair itself looked like something left over from the Spanish Inquisition and the barber performed in the manner of a wrestler trying to unscrew his opponent's head. I tried to keep my mind off the operation itself by reading the list of prices on the wall. A haircut was described as a *coupe de chevaux* and there was an item called a friction. You could get a forty-franc friction or a fifty-franc friction. I wanted none, at any price.

So M. Gaston is a blessing. He doesn't like to journey into the countryside but I said I was willing to have my hair cut at seven o'clock in the morning and he agreed. He comes every ten days and performs his job on the terrace. He speaks a little English and I try to pick up a little French from him. He has a good business — he is able to administer from twenty-five to forty haircuts a day at sixty francs a throw, and this averages out to about twenty dollars a day and the only overhead is his bicycle and the small amount of gasoline he uses. "Is good also," he told me in discussing low overhead, "because use electric of the peeble."

After my haircut on the edge of the perfumed garden I finished a magazine article this morning, the third I've done since our arrival. And then Aurora Natua came for what we playfully call "our first field trip." She is another one of those people, like Lee Taylor Casey of Denver, for whom tuberculosis proved a boon. She had the equivalent of an eighth-grade education, then was an invalid for a long time, and her teachers brought her many books to read in her sickbed. She went to Italy to stay with relatives during her recovery period and while in Europe everyone bombarded her with questions about Tahiti and she was unable to answer many of them. This was embarrassing to her, and she resolved that she would learn everything possible about her native island, and now she is one of the leading authorities on all matters relating to Tahiti and, in fact, to the whole South Pacific. She is frequently employed by Bengt Danielsson and by anthropologists who come down from the Bishop Museum in Hawaii. Everyone tells

me I am very lucky to have found her available as guide, translator and interpreter.

So Aurora and Nelle and I set out in the Dauphine and we stopped at Hotel Tahiti for a cooling drink and then went on around to Tahiti Village Hotel and there I discovered the great utility of the Tahitian shirt, which is worn outside the trousers. I had traveled all that distance from home with my fly open and nobody noticed it.

We went to the Nordhoff home and talked to the writer's widow and son Jim, who are good friends of Aurora's, and were invited into the big green house. Charles Nordhoff had two sons and four daughters here in Tahiti — his friends have told me that he had quite a few other children around the island and that he provided for each of them with a good piece of land. He once said that he would never give his children a formal education, for to do so would ruin their lives. He wanted them to grow up in the same pattern as the natives of the island, content with the basic things — fish and fruit and sleep and guitar music and lovin'. He didn't, however, stick to his purpose and sent them all to school. The girls are now scattered, back in the States, but both boys live in Tahiti. Jim showed me the big room where his father worked and I asked about a big framed photograph above the doorway — a handsome man standing beside a marlin — and it was not Nordhoff, but Zane Grey, who was his friend. Jim had to dig pictures of his father out of a pile of junk in an adjoining storeroom. There were several hundred books in the house, most of them valuable reference works, but these have been rendered almost worthless by years of mildew and the ravages of insects.

The mother didn't talk much. She responded to a few questions from Aurora but only in the Tahitian language. She is known as Vahine Smith and was the daughter of a Danish father and a Tahitian mother. Aurora said she was one of the great beauties of the island when Nordhoff met and married her.

And so we went on out the Broom Road a bit further to the district of Paea and drove down a narrow lane to the waterside home of Bengt Danielsson and at last I met this prominent character of Tahiti. He was none of the men I had seen on the streets of Papeete and identified as the Kon-Tiki anthropologist. He is a youthful-looking man with a long spade beard, brownish in color, and almost completely bald. The natives have two sayings about him. They look at all that hair below and the baldness above and call him Upside Down Face. And they say, "His head grew so fast that it went right through his hair." He takes all this in good grace, for he is as much a wit as he is a scholar. Today when we arrived he was entertaining half a dozen visitors, fellow anthropologists, a couple of archeologists, a French sociologist and a Tahitian gardener from down the road. He interrupted

everything and greeted us with great affability and stirred up drinks for us and then took me across a wide stretch of lawn to a long thatched building which is his office and library. This building contains more books than I have at home, and I have a hell of a heap of them. This is in a land where it is difficult to get good books and, once having acquired them, to preserve them against the ignorant assaults of Mother Nature. One large wall of shelves is devoted to books about Tahiti and her neighbor islands and Danielsson told me to come out whenever I want and help myself to anything he has.

From Danielsson's we drove on to the site of the big Guild house. Having read Caroline Guild's book about her family's adventures in Tahiti, we wanted to see the place where they had the house that was stocked with a shipload of champagne, among other niceties. We had to take the Dauphine back into the jungle to locate the remains of the house and its outbuildings and then we walked out to the concrete pier which they built for their boats and the boats of their regal guests. The Guilds cut a wide and elegant swath in the years they were in Tahiti but today that concrete pier is almost the only trace that's left of them, and it is beginning to crumble.

We drove on to the remnants of the great plantation of Atimaono. This is a broad pastureland extending from the foothills down to the sea, fifteen hundred hectares of flat landscape that somehow reminded me of the mid-Florida cattle land. A rough road bisects the property leading back toward the mountains and the jungle, and we took this road and drove to a compound of big concrete buildings that look like warehouses, with heavy machinery standing around under the coconut trees, and little thatched houses where the workmen live. This somewhat historic spot is now Tahiti's sugar mill and rum distillery and I have been told that if ever a beverage deserved the name of rot-gut, it is the rum that is distilled here. A man came out of a small office building, wearing a red-and-white pareu around his middle, wiping the sleep from his eyes. He and Aurora had a long conversation in French concerning the history of Atimaono.

I first read about the plantation in Robert Langdon's book and I was surprised once I was settled in Tahiti to learn that so few people knew the story. Some people who have lived in Tahiti for years don't know the true reason why the Chinese are the merchants of French Polynesia, and abound in numbers, and in the opinion of many authorities will someday be the rulers of this part of the world. They are here on the island of Tahiti because somebody fired on Fort Sumter.

The shipment of cotton to Europe from our Southern states ceased abruptly when the Civil War began. Soon the mill owners of Manchester were in trouble. They had to get cotton somewhere. They

sent out gentlemen adventurers to various parts of the world with instructions to establish plantations and grow cotton. To Tahiti came a big swashbuckling guy named William Stewart, a true buccaneer with the conscience of a road agent. He set up his plantation and established himself in a baronial house well stocked with choice, tender, Tahitian girlhood. And almost at once he found himself face-to-face with the old problem that confronts every planter who tries to grow sugar cane or pineapples or copra or cotton in Polynesia. The natives don't like to work regular hours and they won't work regular hours and they abhor labor in the fields because there is always an abundance of fish and fruit and taro. So, just as the planters of Hawaii went to Japan and China and the Philippines and Puerto Rico and Portugal for their field hands, this man Stewart went to Hong Kong. He brought a thousand Chinese to Tahiti in two ships under agreement that they would be repatriated in the end. He put them to work and had his cotton plantation running smoothly just in time for the Civil War to end. This was as bad a break for William Stewart as it was for Robert E. Lee. Stewart had reached a position of power in Tahiti where he could have almost anything he wanted. He did this through love. He began by making love to the wife of the district chief. This gave him local influence. Then he put the blocks to the wife of the French Governor, and now he had island-wide influence. The Governor's wife spent a lot of time with him, and he built a French chateau for her in the hills overlooking the plantation. The man had style. He imported sedan chairs and had himself and his lady carried around the property. But now his business began to fall off, and he became involved in serious litigation, and his health went bad and then one day in his seaside house this big, lusty, overpowering man roared out his defiance of the world and fell over dead.

As the fortunes of the plantation dwindled, the Chinese laborers took to growing vegetables and carting them to the market in Papeete. They opened little stores out in the country districts, and then some of the braver souls among them ventured into town and set themselves up in business. Today their descendants number eight thousand and are scattered through all the little islands of French Polynesia. The political seers say these Chinese will assume control eventually because the French are tired of the expense involved in the islands and would like to get out, and the Polynesians are too lazy and indifferent ever to govern themselves. So who is left? The Chinese.

During this day's travels we drove boldly into a number of places where "Tapu" signs warned us to stay out. In each case, when I called attention to the sign, Aurora would say, "It is all right, my cousin is the guardian." In Tahiti a caretaker is called a guardian. Or, she would

say, "One of my cousins is living here, so we will be welcome." She has cousins beyond enumeration, as does Baldwin Bambridge (one of her cousins) and Louise Chauvel and Jeanne Jacquemin who are cousins to everyone. In this land it would be impossible to avoid the malefaction of nepotism — anybody you hired would be your cousin.

Tonight Ripley Gooding was having some drinks at Louise's house, for they are cousins. Before they departed for Punaauia, Ripley and his *vahine*, a native girl named Dorothea, stopped in to pay a courtesy call on us. Ripley is one of the great natural wonders of the South Pacific. He is a former planter who now devotes himself to building hotels. He was born in Tahiti but has spent many years among Americans in San Francisco and Honolulu. He once owned a San Francisco restaurant called Ripley's which is still operating. He is perhaps the most outspoken man on the island. He loves to eat, he loves to drink, he loves to laugh, he loves the women, he enjoys hard physical labor and he is every inch masculine. He is above six feet in height and generally wears a broad-brimmed straw hat with a wide, flopping brim of the type associated with South Sea planters. Someone, in fact, has suggested him as the perfect prototype for Michener's French planter in *South Pacific*. His face, dark by nature and darker from outdoor living, makes me think of the late Jack Holt.

Ripley was in an ebullient mood tonight and took me over the hurdles. He denounced all authors who write books about Tahiti. "God damn it," he roared, "there is not a gentleman among the lot of you cock-a-roaches. Except my pal Jimmie Hall. He was a gentleman. You know why he was a gentleman? He didn't write nasty things about people before they were cold in the grave. That damn Michener! The lousy things he wrote about my pal Leeteg. What a stinking thing to do, with good old Leeteg not even cold in his grave. Fine a drinking pal as a man ever had. How do you think his children must have felt?"

I have heard this complaint before, that writers should be gentlemen and consider the kinfolks of all the people they write about, and especially the children. There was recently published a fine history of the Lindbergh kidnapping and a non-literary friend of mine spent an hour in my presence bellyaching against it, saying the Lindberghs went through enough, why can't the damned writers leave them alone? He insists that there is no excuse for such a book, that it is nothing more than a rehash of old material, and all it does is open a lot of old wounds. Being a thorough gentleman myself, I am in hearty agreement with all these complaints, and I go a step further. I believe that writers should be done away with altogether, except perhaps those who keep us informed about Peter Cottontail and Winnie the Pooh. And they ought to be watched.

Ripley Gooding said that I could go ahead and write my stinking

book but that he wouldn't be caught dead reading a single word of it. I'm glad of that, for now I feel safe in saying that he is a lusty, hearty, two-fisted drinking man of the type I have always admired, and that he is also two-thirds of a creep.

December 31

DROPPED IN on Bill Stone this morning and he talked of the days, not long ago, when Captain Darr had the luxury yacht *Te Vega* often called the most beautiful sailing vessel of modern times. *Te Vega* cruised between Honolulu and Papeete and carried about a dozen passengers, each of whom paid a handsome sum of money for the privilege of sailing on her. I hadn't known it before but Bill said that Ralph Varady was the steward on *Te Vega* and was responsible in large part for the pleasures of the voyage. Captain Darr sold the yacht in 1958 to a tourist organization in the Caribbean and I have heard that she was wrecked beyond repair somewhere around Puerto Rico.

This afternoon Nelle and I drove up to *Bain Loti*, the swimming hole in the Fautaua River which is almost within walking distance of our house and which has more romantic connotations, perhaps, than any other spot in Tahiti. This is one of the principal settings in the idyllic French novel *Le Manage de Loti*, written by Pierre Loti, whose real name was Julian Viaud, but who gave himself the name of Harry Grant in the story. Sounds like a nut, doesn't he? Well, he was. The book is an account of Harry Grant's romance with a stunningly beautiful native girl named Rarahu, whom he first saw lolling around at this pool with very little clothes on. This book has had a profound influence on the history of Tahiti. It was *Le Manage de Loti* that led Paul Gauguin to choose Tahiti for his island of escape. The novel also put the Tahiti bug into the mind of Frederick O'Brien, the first American writer to arouse great public interest in the South Seas.

The pool itself is a wide space in the little river, with a concrete abutment on the side toward the roadway and a diving platform about fifteen feet above the water on the far side. Diving is not the word. Tahitians don't go into the water head-first. They jump, feet downward, body rigid, hand clasped to nose. The women employ a slightly different technique. They leap in a sitting position, so that their bottoms hit the water first, making a gigantic splash.

Between the pool and the road is a tall pillar surmounted by a bust of Loti himself. There is a story about this statue. Thirty years ago a young French novelist came to Tahiti and announced himself to be a great admirer of Loti. He went, of course, to visit the pool and he was astonished that there was no monument to commemorate the romantic events that took place on the spot. He announced that he would rectify the oversight. He went back to France and raised a fund among other admirers of Loti, and had the bust made, and shipped it out, and I imagine he came along for the unveiling. A crowd gathered for the ceremony and when the sheet was pulled off the sculpture

everyone cheered, and then everyone did a double take, for the head and face of Pierre Loti bore a striking resemblance to the head and face of the young novelist who raised the money. I studied the head pretty closely but, knowing neither party, I can make only one observation: whoever it is, he looks queer.

The novel is said to be an accurate account of the author's own love affair with Rarahu, who was fourteen when he met her. They were married in The Tahitian Way. I have read a synopsis of the story rendered into English, and I will now synopsise the synopsis. Loti and Rarahu were a moody pair and seemed to do more praying than anything else. They sat around together, telling each other to pray hard for happiness, promising each other to pray fervently for the future. Their great sorrow seemed to be that Loti, a gutless wonder, was going to sail away and forsake his great love, whereas if he had wanted to he could have thumbed his nose at the French Navy, by whom he was employed, and disappeared into the brush with Rarahu.

They had a lot of delicious moments but these usually degenerated into more sadness and praying for the reason that it would all have to end, and Loti would go far away to his own country and they would never see each other again. So they kept praying a lot, this being the way Loti figured he would find a solution, for he really loved this girl, he said. He said it. He knew he was going away but he prayed and he told her to pray that they should meet again some day, if only in heaven. Then he got to worrying about what would happen to her after he departed. He couldn't bear the thought of her in the arms of some other sailor, the nasty beast, taking advantage of such a sweet little native girl, the dirty dog, and so he begged of her that she stay away from sinful, concupiscent Papeete after he was gone, and she prayed a little over this proposition and then said she would follow instructions. She said she would remain his unadulterated little wife forevermore, and so he sailed away with a heavy heart.

Rarahu tried it in the back woods for a while, but she suffered from the whizzies, and her prayer didn't stick, and so she came out of the rural districts and began hitting the high spots of Papeete and pretty soon she was shackled up with a French officer. Then she left him and went on the town and became a dissolute hag. She was a real bum, with a face like a death's-head, no place to sleep, roaming the streets at night in tatters, accompanied by an old cat — a decrepit and mangy animal with rings in its ears. She was dying of consumption and booze and in the end she departed for Bora Bora, her native island, where she lived out the rest of her brief span.

To me this is a highly moral tale. The morals contained in it are as follows: (1) men are no damn good; (2) women are no damn good; (3) there is some question about prayer.

I have one minor quibble about the novel. Rarahu is described as having her eyes set close together, a characteristic feature of her face, and this gave her face the mischievous shyness of a marmoset. This doesn't sound particularly good to me. A marmoset is a ring-tailed monkey. And not long ago Howard Phillips, who is an editor and an art critic, told me that all artists consider wide-set eyes to be the most beautiful; that a woman whose eyes are separated by the exact width of one eye is the loveliest of all women, at least as far as the eyes are concerned.

Such, then, is my report on Loti and his book and his pool; I surprise myself sometimes with my critical acumen. There remain two additional items to round out the story. Prior to the arrival of Loti, and his romanticizing of the pool and the river, the area was known to the natives as The Valley of the Spotted Hog. And there is a tale of Rarahu's last days on Bora Bora which is reminiscent of *The Procurator of Judea* by Anatole France. It is told that after Loti's novel was published and became a big success, someone went to the ailing Rarahu on Bora Bora and asked for her version of the romance. "Loti?" said Rarahu. "A young French officer? I cannot remember — there were so many of them."

Tonight we remembered that it was New Year's Eve and so we made a half-hearted tour of the bars, stopping at Quinn's for a while, and then Vaima, where the people were just sitting and drinking and not making any noise. Then on out to the island's social center, Hotel Tahiti, where the parking lot was filled and cars were lined up along the roadway for almost a mile. The hotel was jammed with drinkers and dancers and we ran into one woman, of Tahitian antecedents, who complained bitterly about the presence of so many Chinese. We didn't even try for a table but wandered around in the crowd for a while and then went home and got out our books. I read about an old-time marriage ceremony among the Polynesians which struck me as slightly novel. After the ceremony the bride stretched herself on the floor, her head resting on her husband's knee. All the able-bodied men of the village then lined up and one by one had their way with her, until she was so exhausted that she could bear no more of it. Ever afterward she would be admired in her community in proportion to the number of men she was able to accommodate on her wedding day.

Louise and Jeanne Jacquemin stopped in for drinks and among other things talked about Louise's pig. Several months ago Louise went wandering up into the hills back of her property and she came upon a little farm run by an old Chinaman. The old man had some pigs including one that looked to be dying of starvation. Louise, an animal lover, asked for the sick pig and got it and carried it home and began feeding it milk. She expected it to die the first night but in the

morning it seemed stronger, and she kept feeding it, buying it special things, and it began to prosper. It took to running around with Louise's five dogs and very likely got the idea that *it* was a dog. Dogs have a social order, or precedence, or protocol, when they travel in groups and the pig always brought up the rear of the single-file procession, but she was happy nonetheless and trotted along behind the dogs, grunting her contentment. She was treated the same as the dogs, and became a pet, and used to come and lie in the sun with the cats and dogs on our front terrace. Occasionally she got into the house but she had trouble with her footing — she was inclined to slip and slide and fall down on the slick floors. It was very comical to see her feet spread-eagling out from under her and they used to fetch her inside during parties just for laughs. Then word came that The Congressman was on his way and would be occupying the premises for a couple of weeks. Tahitians, even educated Tahitians, have an exaggerated idea about congressmen. Mme. Jacquemin told Louise that she should get rid of the pig — that a congressman would not like to have a pig running around his yard and sliding around his living room. Moreover, said Madame Jayjay, this pig was getting to be a big fat ungainly sow. So Louise got in touch with the man who runs the grocery store up the road (he is her cousin) and he had a farm somewhere in the country and the pig was taken out there. Louise still has a motherly sort of feeling about the pig, however. Recently an old workman found a patch of pumpkins growing on the other side of the Hamuta River and Louise sent a wagonload of them out to her former pet. A pig, it must be noted, is one of a Tahitian's most valued possessions and during the wild Bastille Day celebration in July the most popular booths on the waterfront are those in which suckling pigs are raffled off.

Louise and her sister also told stories about the gendarmes who rule the smaller islands of French Polynesia. There was one officer who had charge of Raiatea and one day he gave a big lawn party for a lot of *fonctionnaires* and their wives from Tahiti. The party was elegant in every respect but the gendarme and his wife made one mistake — they served Chinese doughnuts. These were horrid, gray, unchewable, indigestible pastries. The guests assembled in the garden and tried to conduct themselves with propriety, and pretended to eat the doughnuts. But it was an impossibility, and there was an avenue of escape at hand. The lawn was pockmarked with land crab holes, perhaps a hundred of them. And so, when host and hostess were not looking, the guests quietly poked their doughnuts down the crab holes. They got away with it — almost. The next morning the gendarme and his wife went into the garden and found that the land crabs in turn had rejected the delicacies and would not even permit

the ghastly things in their homes and had pushed them all out of their holes and back onto the lawn.

There was another gendarme, assigned to Moorea, who decided he wanted to grow his own vegetables. He needed plenty of good manure so he acquired a horse. Now, as long as he had a horse, he figured the animal should be put to work, so he bought a cart, and began using horse and cart in his journeys over the island. This led to his spending a lot of time traveling away from his home, and he got to worrying about the safety of his official papers and government funds. These things were kept in an old iron safe in the gendarme's house. But now, fearing burglars, he had the safe hoisted into his cart and carried it with him on his travels. The weight of the safe caused the cart wheels to chew up the roadways of Moorea until they became all but impassable — at least it was no longer a pleasure to go driving over them. So that gendarme gave up everything — the perambulating safe, the cart, the horse, the manure, and the vegetable garden. A nice study in futility.

January 1

I WISH I could report that the pigeon I rescued from the black cat has recovered his health and now follows me, his savior, around like a faithful puppy dog and roosts outside my bedroom window at night, ready to yell "Orrrrrk!" if danger threatens. But I have not seen him. He may be back with the flock but I doubt it. The last time I saw him he had come down off the roof and was limping across the lawn toward the river. From there he probably went downstream to the Broom Road and got hit by a Chinaman on a Vespa.

Today I finished an article concerned with tourist cruises and sailing ships and I took it out to have Ralph Varady check it for nautical accuracy. He expressed surprise that I used the term taffrail correctly, but he changed Plimsoll mark to Plimsoll line. I changed it back to Plimsoll mark.

The common currency of the island is not the Pacific franc. It is gossip. They meet (I mean *we* meet) early each morning, gathering in little knots along the waterfront with the sidewalk cafe as the focal point, and the buzz-whuzz rises in the air and can be heard in Raratonga and Rurutu. Nelle went to call on one prominent lady of the town who had been ill and she said, "My God, I've been home for two days — I've got to get downtown and hear the latest dirt or I'll die." I have overheard two women at Bar Vaima gossiping so hard at each other that one was carried away completely and began narrating a scandalous occurrence in the private life of her friend across the table. And a French government official of my acquaintance, whenever he encounters me on the street, cries out, "Hold steel! I have some fine gossips for you!" If it is not already apparent let me say that the fine gossips are ninety-nine per cent impure, being concerned with illicit romance all over the island. Nobody sleeps with anybody else in Tahiti without all hands knowing about it immediately. The coconut radio is set up and geared for the dissemination of such juicy news and every single inhabitant of the island is a full-time correspondent. Let it be noted that scandal and Hinano beer are almost the life blood of the community. And gossip is accepted as a part of The Tahitian Way, even by its victims. The people here are forthright and honest about it and speak their minds in public. In the small communities back home the back-stabbing and slander are more subtle and devious. Here in Papeete a typical conversation might go as follows:

"You know that new woman, Carlene Gallese, she took the Walker house in Punaauia?"

"Oh sure."

‘What do you think of her?’

“She’s a mean, nasty, conniving bitch, out for some kind of world’s record on the mattress, and if she starts fooling around my Fred or my Charlie or my Virgil or even my husband, she’s going to get a rock laid up against her head.”

“I take it you don’t like her very much.”

I have heard it said that there are forty-seven individual pipelines into the local hospital, a great source of news. The story is told of an M-G-M actor who developed some alarming symptoms and made his way surreptitiously to the hospital. He emerged from the place fifteen minutes later with some medicine in his pocket and walked two blocks and in front of the post office met another M-G-M actor, who greeted him: “Hey, kid! How you feeling? Heard you got the clap.”

And now on the first day of the year I must report, with some delicate restraint and a certain amount of hesitancy, that a tremendous and earth-shaking thing has happened to me. All of a sudden the pills and the tonic have taken effect. As they say down South, Lord-a-mercy! I have turned into a sex wagon. With four-wheel drive. *This* on top of all the natural vitality I already had. I’ve got to be a little careful or it’ll kill me. I must be careful, too, not to talk about it, not to let the old men of Tahiti know what has happened. They would surely waylay me at night and seize the formula.

Lord . . . a . . . MERCY!

January 2

THE BUSTLING waterfront remains for me the most fascinating part of Tahiti and so today, in the company of Aurora Natua, we began an inspection of its landmarks. There is a tiny island out in the middle of the harbor, called Motu Uta, with a few small buildings on it. At the present time this is Tahiti's quarantine station. Because of its location between the reef and the wharves, it has seen a lot of history. When the French first seized Tahiti they planted their flag on Motu Uta — the suggestion is strong that they were too nervous to do it closer in. It was on this island, too, that King Pomare II used to join with the English missionary Nott for the purpose of translating the Bible into Tahitian. Setting out for the island retreat Pomare always carried an ample supply of booze and there is reason to assume that the missionary did most of the translating. Those Pomares were great men with the jug.

During World War II the little island served as a concentration camp. In those bitter days Tahiti was split between De Gaullists and Vichyites and at least one duel was fought, with nobody getting seriously hurt. When the island finally decided for De Gaulle, it was necessary to intern a lot of rebellious Vichyites, plus a few Germans and a few Italians. Motu Uta proved too small to take care of this crowd so most of the Vichyites were taken to another island. Somebody told me that one of Tahiti's finest artisans learned his trade and developed his skill while a prisoner of war on Motu Uta. In the end the Germans and the Italians and one Jap were the only prisoners on the little island. Eventually the Germans and the Italians took to quarreling and then the leader of the German faction drew a line across the island and said, don't you guineas step beyond this mark, and the Italians said the same goes for you pediculous krautheads, and nobody knows which side the Jap took.

The westerly portion of the waterfront is taken up with old houses and here lived George Pritchard, the most famous of the missionaries, who was a saint if you were a Protestant and a devil if you were a Catholic. The chief landmark of this westerly area is the Protestant church with its white body and red steeple; it is the most prominent physical feature of Papeete as you approach the town by ship. We often pass this church on Sundays and see the congregation through the open doors and windows — ninety per cent women and children, with the women in ankle-length white dresses, festooned with lace, and some wearing boat-shaped white hats. The sermons are in Tahitian and there is much singing and those who have made a study of the Christian religion on the island say there is not any deep

spiritual feeling involved. Church, to these people, is a social gathering place, as it is in the New York county where I live. They have a Tahitian term for the church building: the sing house.

The true harbor begins at Avenue Bruat, the street of the two bookstores, of the handsome young French doctor, of the local police and the gendarmerie and the court buildings where white wigs and black gowns are worn. Here stands a monument to Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who anchored in Matavai Bay in 1768 and whose bust has been placed in this prominent location to bolster the ego of the French *fonctionnaires* and reassure them that they are here, ruling over the island, by a sort of Divine Right. Nearby is a long red building, facing the harbor, which houses officials of the French Navy and tied up in front of it a lonely-looking French warship, *La Capricieuse*. A recent visiting magazine writer, grown heavily emotional over the island, described this vessel as being trim, sleek and formidable. She is none of these. She is a tin can. I have looked her over carefully and I get the impression that she could be sent to the bottom with a .22 rifle. But she has one good trait — she sends groups of French sailors, in their pom-pom berets, ranging around town, adding color to the scene and giving the waterfront gals something to work on when tourist trade is slow.

Now and then warships from other lands come in to Papeete and usually this spells excitement. A Frenchman told me that the worst case on record was a ship from Egypt, which sent its crew ashore and within an hour there were forty fights in progress along the street. Ordinary brawls are expected and even welcomed but the Egyptians carried dirks and straight razors and enjoyed seeing the blood flow, and this was carrying matters just a trifle too far. A Mexican warship touches here occasionally and there are many fights, but they are more in the spirit of fun and when the slugging is over the participants usually end up hugging each other and getting stoned together. Not long ago the U.S.S. *Louisville* was here and a thousand physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight American boys swarmed ashore. The local people still talk of that day. They say the town was a raging bedlam for eight or ten hours, and a fleet of barges and other small craft had to be chartered to haul the fallen warriors out to the *Louisville's* anchorage. I have heard it said that the phase the moon was in had something to do with the carnage.

There is always a certain amount of excitement on the waterfront when a crew member misses the last launch or arrives after the gangway has been raised. Once three members of a Matson liner crew were late and had to be hurried to the moving ship by launch and hauled through the port. On the captain's orders they were ushered straightaway to the bridge. Later somebody asked the captain what he

had said to them, and he replied, "Well, I started with their shoes and worked up."

We went through the Hotel Stuart, which once had a famous bar and gathering place on the second floor terrace, overlooking the harbor. This bar was called the Cercle Polynesian and I regret that I didn't get here in time to see it in operation. We lingered on the terrace but the Cercle was gone, to be supplanted by such present-day institutions as Vaima and the bar at the Hotel Tahiti. Papeete has always had a favorite resort for the traveler, featuring good drinks and hearty companionship. In the old days, it was the porch of the Hotel Tiare, presided over by one of Tahiti's most fabulous characters, Lovaina Gooding. Lovaina, who was Ripley Gooding's aunt, was enormously fat and impressively efficient in running her hotel. Both Somerset Maugham and Frederick O'Brien have written extensively about her good nature and her fine cooking and her motherly concern for every lonely traveler who came her way. In later years the Papeete Yacht Club, on the waterfront, was the town's chief drinking resort. The club had nothing to do with yachts but it had a hole which was a tourist attraction for a long time. During the first World War a couple of German cruisers bombarded Papeete and one shell entered the Yacht Club and went through an inner wall. For years afterward the proprietor of the place enjoyed showing off this hole to visitors. A hole as a tangible thing has always somehow fascinated me. I once read an article about peculiar hobbies, and there was a brief account in it of a woman who collected woodpecker holes. I worried about her methods for quite a while and finally arrived at the conclusion that a woodpecker hole, in order to be collectible, would need to have some wood left around it. Otherwise it would be difficult to handle. And easily lost.

Ralph Varady has written about the Cercle Polynesian in his book. He used to go there frequently and he has described some of the more colorful South Sea characters who made it their headquarters when they were in Tahiti. For one thing Ralph remembers that Ripley Gooding's booming laughter was almost always heard in the place. Captain Frame, who still pilots the flying boats between Papeete and Bora Bora, was another regular, along with the famous raftsmen Thor Heyerdahl and Eric de Bisschop. Henri Matisse lived in the Hotel Stuart when he came out to Tahiti to find out what color is really like. Today the building has a sturdy look, but it is rundown and grown decrepit. It was probably the last word in South Sea elegance when it was opened in 1926.

Next door to this hotel, at the corner of Rue de la Reine Pomare IV, is a vacant lot enclosed by a faded picket fence of the kind I remember out of my Midwestern childhood, with two wooden gates, each

strangely chained and padlocked. Inside the fence there is nothing but weeds and ragged grass, a plumeria tree in one corner and a papaya in another. This was where the cottage housing the American consulate stood for many years. It, too, was a gathering place for many notables. The cottage was torn down after the last consul departed, but now I hear that a new building will be erected on the site and the American consulate at Suva will be transferred to Papeete.

Back of this vacant lot, facing on the Broom Road, is another wooden cottage painted a dirty yellow and this was the home of Queen Marau, the wife of Pomare V. A Queen's home — and it looks precisely like a modest house that might stand, unpretentiously, in a residential area of McLeansboro, Illinois. When Henry Adams and John La Farge came to Tahiti they lived a long while in the American consulate and spent many hours with Queen Marau and her sisters in the yellow house next door and from the Queen got much of the information which Adams used in a privately printed history of her family. This yellow cottage, in turn, stands across the Broom Road from the park containing the former royal palace, a big wooden building which looks like one of those old Saratoga side-street boardinghouses, and which now is used for Government financial offices. Nearby, too, is the building that was once the Hotel de Paris, where Paul Gauguin sometimes got drunk.

Jeanne Jacquemin, as manager for South Pacific Air Lines in Tahiti, has her office and staff in the Hotel Stuart building and a few steps away is the *établissement* of Tony A. Bambridge, the authentic Tahitian tycoon. Tony Bambridge is a man with a theme color — cobalt blue. His large business building here on the waterfront is kept freshly painted in that color. All his movie theaters around the island, no matter how crude and rat-ridden inside, are kept in the same condition outside. Aurora told us that Tony has two or three residences on the island and these, too, are cobalt blue. All along the waterfront are blackboards on which are chalked the latest shipping intelligence — a custom almost as old as the town itself. Today, however, the blackboards often have more news of airplane arrivals and departures than of ships and schooners. But not at Tony Bambridge's. His blackboard tells only of ship movements; he doesn't recognize air travel.

An entire library of books could be filled with the stories of the people who, down through the years, have tied up their boats along Papeete's waterfront, and of those who have stepped off the big liners to make their homes here or simply to visit for a while. Recently an Australian vaudeville company passed through and among its members was a midget. A crowd of Tahitian natives, who had never seen a midget before, quickly surrounded the tiny man in the middle

of the waterfront street. They formed a big circle and stood and stared, nudging one another, trying to suppress their giggling. The midget remained unabashed. He had a movie camera and he stood with it in the middle of that crowd and trained it on the natives, turning slowly, getting them all on his film.

There used to be an old Pacific hand named Captain George Dibbern who skippered a cruising ketch, *Te Rapunga*. He often tied up here and sat around with the local boys, spinning tales of the sea. He told of a time when he had been cruising in the Cooks and how on a certain evening he got his position all reckoned and, knowing that he was in safe waters, a long distance from any island or any reef, he retired to his cabin and stretched himself out on his bunk, relaxed and happy. Captain Dibbern described himself as one of those seafaring men who can smell land a long way off. In the South Pacific such men usually detect the odor of flowers a long time before land is actually sighted. So Captain Dibbern was lying there in his bunk and suddenly his nostrils began to quiver. It was, he said, "that soft, delicately scented island breeze, once smelt never forgotten." But the odor did not please him — he was alarmed at having made such a faulty calculation. He believed that at any moment his ship might crash into a jagged reef, and he leaped from his bunk. At that same instant his cabin boy came through the doorway, and the scent of the land grew stronger, and then the truth revealed itself. The boy had been anointing his hair with coconut oil, heavily scented with tropic blossoms, and that redolent island breeze was coming straight off his head.

We covered the waterfront as far east as Bar Vaima and then called a recess. Sitting at one of the sidewalk tables, Aurora pointed out the spot where the mail boat used to tie up once every twenty-eight days. It wasn't too long ago that the islanders had to be satisfied with mail arriving every fourth Saturday. A ship came in from San Francisco, bringing letters and packages from the States, and then on the following Monday another ship traveling eastward picked up Tahiti's outgoing mail. So it was that on every fourth Saturday and Sunday all social life ceased. The mail came on Saturday and people retired to their homes with it, and then on Sundays they devoted themselves to writing answers. That was one Sunday when nobody called on anybody else.

Now the mail arrives several times a week and tonight we went out to the Hotel Tahiti to pick up our letters from home. While sitting around the hotel we met for the second time a man and wife who are world travelers and who make their home in a large Midwestern city. We sat down to talk with them and they told us that they spend six months out of every year traveling in foreign lands. I asked them how

much luggage they carry and they said one large bag each, never any more than that. This, and other information they let drop about themselves, led me to believe that we were in the presence of good, sensible, well-read and intelligent American tourists. Then gradually another picture took form. They said that their principal interest in traveling was to look at and buy up art treasures in foreign lands. Not for museums, for themselves. In the course of talking about this pursuit, the husband managed in an offhand way to reveal that he is in the seventy per cent tax bracket. They have seen nothing of interest in Tahiti and dislike the island. They spoke feelingly of the fact that there is no symphony here and no art galleries. "There is not a thing here to interest us," said the husband. "That puny archeological museum downtown is nothing at all, a grubby little building full of dirty canoe paddles."

I tried to sell these people on the fascinations of the waterfront, on the pleasure to be had from just sitting and looking.

I told of our afternoon activities and mentioned the site of the old American consulate and said there would soon be a new one, and the man wanted to know why. He said it was sheer idiocy and a waste of money to have a consulate here.

"I happen to be in the seventy per cent tax bracket," he said, just in case I hadn't heard him the first time. "And I'm getting doggone tired of seeing my money rammed down a rat hole." I argued with him, and said I thought Tahiti really needs a consul, that there are two hundred Americans living here and a steady flow of American tourists, some of whom stay as long as six months. Many of these Americans get into red-tape snarls with the French, and some of them get into police difficulties. I pointed out that I could knock over a Tahitian cyclist with my Dauphine and be snatched into jail and held incommunicado. To whom would I turn for help?

"The answer is simple," said this Mr. D. "Don't come out here in the first place. If you're not prepared to face up to the inconveniences of travel, then stay home. It would cost more than a hundred thousand dollars a year to maintain a consul in this Godforsaken place. Why should we keep a man here to worry about the petty affairs of a few dopey tourists? We have no important business operations here to justify a consulate. To hell with the tourists."

Yes, to hell with the tourists. In his view we are a government dedicated to the welfare of business — not people. All for trade, nothing for pleasurable living. I felt like suggesting that if he didn't like the seventy per cent tax he ought to come out here and live in Tahiti and learn to love dirty canoe paddles. But he beat me to the draw.

"The American people," he said, "are too soft. Don't know how to

take care of themselves. Got no backbone. I don't want any sniveling consul looking after me. I can take care of myself. Let me tell you about a little incident that took place two weeks before we left home. A cop had the nerve to give me a ticket for speeding. Stopped me *less than a block from my own home*. No cop can get away with that kind of insolence with *me*. I told him who I was and the big boob just stood there writing out the ticket. So I telephoned a judge about it and he said, 'Oh, I'm very sorry, Mr. D. Tear up the ticket and forget about it and you can rest assured that it'll not happen again.' You've got to stand up and let yourself be heard in this world."

Mr. D. gave every indication of being proud of his conduct in the affair of the traffic ticket, proud of the influence he wields in his home town. And I think he promulgated an interesting new point of criminal law: you can murder somebody and not be arrested for it provided you do it within one block of your own house.

In the car going home Nelle said, "Ugly American." And I said, "No. This is Mr. Ugly J. Ugly himself."

January 3

THERE HAS been no fresh bread in Tahiti for four days and there is no bread at all in the stores. This is slightly disturbing to us, but not to other people. The bread famine is normal for this time of year because the bakers are all drunk, or so horribly hung over that they can't even knead dough. Most of them are at parties out in the country, New Year's parties that began last Saturday and in many cases are still going. It is a difficult thing to get a Tahitian party to arrive at a conclusion until the last drop of booze or beer is gone. At Fanao store the Chinese girls smile at us when we ask for bread and say, "They will be back from country maybe tomorrow."

In the time of the great annual madness, the Bastille Day celebration, which usually lasts two or three weeks, there is more than a shortage of bread. With the island people and all the visitors feasting day after day, all the pigs and cattle are slaughtered and used up, all the canned corned beef vanishes and even the Spam is exhausted.

We have run into several traveling American couples, people who are getting along in years and who have plenty of money, and it is a little surprising to find their moral standards so high. By this I mean their attitudes toward sex and strong language — not their standards of honesty. There is very little profanity among the men, even when they are away from the ladies. They say gosh and doggone and dam and heck. I happen to believe that man is a cussing animal and it is clear that in this department his woman has tamed him down. These people, important in their individual communities, don't discuss sex at all if they can avoid it and they never joke about it. Yet it is necessary that they recognize the unorthodox sex pattern of Tahiti, and speak of it, and they try to employ the disinterested tone of the social scientist when they do so. They say "intercourse."

The Mullens from Michigan have been vacationing out at Lotus Village, one of the hotels built by Ripley Gooding. They told us today how a handsome Frenchman has moved into the bungalow next door to them, in the company of two young Tahitian girls. "We haven't been able," said Mullen, "to figure out what goes on in that bungalow. Whenever they are inside the shades are pulled on our side of the house and they play records by the hour. Sometimes all three of them come out and go in the pool. The two girls seem to be very friendly toward each other. We just can't make anything out of it. What do you suppose they do in there?"

"There's only one double bed in that bungalow," said Mrs. Mullen. "He's a real nice-looking fellow for a Frenchman, and I understand he's a champion water-skier. But what on earth do they do?"

I said I had no idea what they do, but that I keep hearing about new developments in sex, and the world is so full of a number of things I was sure we should all be as ecstatic as kings.

Ralph Varady has had a letter from an American film company which is sending a crew here to photograph Americans who are engaged in adventurous occupations and hazardous jobs in Tahiti. Ralph says he cant think of any — that this is no longer a land of high adventure and hazard. Nobody goes outside the reef to grapple with sharks. The government won't allow foreigners to dive for pearls. Some Americans come down here and drink themselves to death but their adventures would take up too much footage. I said I thought the most hazardous job out here is that of the traffic cop at the intersection of Rue des Remparts and the Broom Road, but he is not an American. And I still think that people are lying to me when they say nobody is ever hit on the head by a falling coconut. I believe that the most dangerous occupation on the island is walking around.

At our house there are periodic thumpings all day long as the heavy coconuts hit the ground. The falling breadfruit also make a loud thudding noise, and there are lesser thumps as the mangoes and the avocados come down. The tempo of this thumping and thudding increases during the night when cooling air causes a contraction of the stems. Parenthetically, I would like to say that Nelle grows slightly ill at the spectacle of the chickens pecking all day long at beautiful avocados which would cost fifty cents apiece back home.

I continue asking people if they know of anyone being brained by a coconut, and the answers are always negative, as if there were a civic conspiracy against ever revealing the truth. The natives say there is a natural reason why a coconut never hits a human head. The coconut itself has eyes, which are clearly discernible, and as it falls it can see when it is about to hit someone, and so it veers off. If it *should* ever hit a person, it would be a deliberate criminal act on the part of the coconut and so its parent tree would be condemned, and cut down, and the stump covered over. I can almost believe that a coconut has a certain malevolent intelligence concealed in its milk. A couple of nights ago one was lying in the middle of the driveway and I was upon it with the Dauphine before I realized how big it was. That coconut leaped upward and embraced the underside of the little car and sounded as if it were trying to rip through the floor and attack me, and rattled and banged around halfway down the long driveway and then gave up and dropped back to the ground. I stopped the car and got out and picked it up and shook it. It still had plenty of milk in it. Clabbered, probably.

Every book about the South Seas lists the many uses of the coconut and its by-products and so I will go along with the crowd, and set

down some of the products which come from this most remarkable tree: various beverages, pickles, brooms, mats, slippers, bags, fans, braid, cups, charcoal, wood preservative, buttons, buckles, trays, insulation, plaster board, yarns, brushes, rugs, rope, fiber mats, tile, medicines, dye, soap, hair oil, vinegar, helmets and a delicacy known as millionaire's salad, made from the heart of the palm. When I was on Bora Bora for the big Matson party I saw, in one of the booths, a brassiere made from coconut fibers. I touched it and it gave off a prickly feel and I thought at the time that it would be quite rough on a woman's skin, but perhaps no rougher than a member of the merchant marine.

With some pride I would like to report that I have worked in sennit. This is a stout cord made from coconut fibers. Sennit itself has many uses. Large chunks of fish are strung on it for the convenience of shoppers in the public market. It is made into net bags for carrying oranges. It held the old-time war canoes together and it is employed in furniture making. We have a chaise longue on the terrace strung with heavy rubber cord, which has rotted and broken, and I have been shopping for plastic clothesline or some such material to replace the rubber. In Tahiti outdoor electric wiring comes in bright colors, blues and reds and yellows, and I even thought of trying that. Then along came Ripley Gooding and told me to use sennit. So I bought a mile or so of it in a Chinese store and spent an hour threading it onto the frame and, even though sennit has a ragged look, the effect was splendid.

The finest product of the coconut is coconut cream. This is not the milky liquid out of the center of the nut. Coconut cream is made from time to time by our Henryetta, squatting outside Louise's kitchen door. She sits astride a wooden plank, from the end of which projects a small steel disk with a sawtoothed edge. Henryetta whacks open a coconut with her machete, dumps the liquid, then crouches down and begins grating the meat into a wooden bowl. Later this grated meat is placed in a piece of muslin and the cream squeezed out. It takes a long time to get one small pitcher of cream but the result is about the finest food product in Tahiti. It is poured over desserts, such as baked papaya flavored with black strips of native vanilla. And it is simply superb in coffee.

Coconut oil begins with the grated meat which is loaded in wooden bowls, covered with leaves and set in the sun. The meat ferments, freeing the oil which settles to the bottom. It is then scented with gardenia juice, or the perfume of some other native flower. For generations the girls of Tahiti have used this oil, rubbing their bodies and dressing their hair with it. I have read that it sometimes becomes rancid and gives off an evil smell but nobody is offended by this — a

girl with a rancid smell is given credit for at least trying.

We continue using the wonderful Monoi Tiare Tahiti which was first recommended to me by Jack Crawford. We employ this scented coconut oil as a sun tan lotion, for a hair dressing, and as a balm to make the skin feel soft and glowing. Before long I suspect we may be using it as a salad dressing and I am resolved that when the time comes to leave I am going to take ten gallons of it home with me, if the law permits me to do so.

We return again to the subject of copra and its smell. I am still conscious of the copra aroma along the waterfront but it remains a pleasant odor to me as well as to Nelle. The word itself has a kind of romantic connotation even though nobody is certain about how it should be pronounced. The dictionary says the *o* is short as in copper, but almost everyone makes it sound like cobra. Back in New York we were walking along Fifth Avenue with Marion Gough, the magazine gal, and she spoke of copra, pronouncing it as in copper. It didn't sound as musical as it does the other way. However, I am able to discount Marion Gough as an authority because she has been scarred for life by mispronunciations. People can't handle her surname, which is pronounced Golf. Once she was visiting Yellowstone Park, and waiting to be called to join a tour party. Finally the man called out, "Miss Google." At first Miss Gough ignored the call, but finally she stepped forward and found that she was Miss Google. And the tour guide offered no apology, merely showing her how, on his scribbled list of names, Gough looked like Google.

Have I slighted breadfruit? We have had little traffic with it, except for hearing it thump in the night. We ate it a few times but didn't care much for it. Captain Cook tried it when he was here and wrote in his journal that it tasted like "the crumb of wheathen bread mixed with a Jerusalem artichoke." Captain Cook had his barmy moments.

January 4

OUR ONNA who skates on the rags was washing and breaking dishes today in Louise's kitchen and Louise, unhappy over the steady destruction of chinaware, issued a warning that she was not going to buy any more. With solemn eyes Onna said to her: "Your dishes are rotten, and that is why they break so much."

The Tahitian servants are, in many ways, quite irresponsible. The rotary mower is set to hug the ground, otherwise there would be brown toes flying all over the garden, mixed with a sauce of shredded avocado and breadfruit. Onna sometimes jockeys this mower over the lawn but the job is usually assigned to a handsome Tahitian boy known on the premises as The Mahu. He strides around the property with the graceful movements and erect posture of the beachboys at Waikiki. Nobody is certain that he is queer but he is called The Mahu because he won't even flirt with the girls and he is skilled at working both indoors and out.

Things go smoothly at our house with only the standard number of nuisances to disturb our serenity. Up to this week I had not been able to get anything sensible out of our big German radio. It is a handsome machine and has an extra amplifier for stereo records but the radio part is so complex that it baffles me. We are not interested in the one local station, which broadcasts for a few hours each day in French. I have reason to believe that our antenna is broken because it is difficult to get good short-wave reception. One evening I stumbled on a complete fifteen-minute newscast from California — a glorious quarter hour of the events of the day, in Sacramento. I can take just a certain amount of local news of Sacramento and then it gets tiresome. Lately I have been able to pick up warbles and chirpings from a Dallas station, and I have located KNX out of Los Angeles and once or twice a week we have been able to hear one or two items of news which we didn't give a damn about.

Termites gnaw happily at the house and the furniture without hindrance, as they do elsewhere on the island. Nobody considers it worthwhile to oppose them, just as nobody opposes the cockroaches. In the beginning I thought that if I ever decided to live in Tahiti I would build a house of solid concrete so the termites and other varmints couldn't eat it down. Now even that procedure would seem to be futile. I have learned that the coral reef, in spite of its reputation for strength and durability, is continually being eaten away by white coral worms. These creatures look like strings of spaghetti and have a diamond-hard mouth. They could eat down a concrete house before the mixture had a chance to set.

Coral worms remind me of another unpleasant fact that has just come to my attention. A man from *Time* magazine lived in our house a while back. This accounts, I'm sure, for the many writing errors and reportorial blunders I have been making lately. It accounts also for the fact that I have been sticking out my lower lip and behaving in an arrogant manner toward the world in general. Now that I know the reason for these afflictions I will be able, through incantation and insecticide, to get back into my normal stride.

We use each night the most popular form of insect exterminator known to the island — the *serpent chinois*, or Chinese snake. This is a contrivance made of Chinese punk, colored green and formed into a spiral about four inches in diameter. The green snake is mounted on a little tin stand and a match is applied to the outer tip of the coil. It burns for six or seven hours, giving off fumes that are said to kill mosquitoes or, at least, to keep them out of the house. I saw my first *serpent chinois* in the bungalow I had on Bora Bora. I didn't know what it was and I didn't ask — I simply assumed that it was some kind of a religious thing belonging to the chambermaid. Now we burn two of them every night and I have a feeling that in the end we will get rid of all insects, destroy the lingering Timesmell, and asphyxiate ourselves in the bargain.

Up the Broom Road from our place, in the district of Arue, is a house with the skeleton of a fish in the front yard. The skeleton is about fifteen feet long and is sometimes covered with banana leaves and made to look like a monster of the deep and then it is carried in processions. It belongs to an elderly lady, Madame Rosa, who is the only district chiefess on the island. She has certain eccentricities, such as summoning her people to meetings by blowing on a conch shell, and such as leading a militant feminist movement in Tahiti. She wants women to have more of a hand in government. Some say she wants women to have the whole hand in government. There are weekly meetings of women at her house and Louise and Jeanne sometimes go. I am told that the chiefess knows little English but that when she gets real riled up and is delivering an oration against men she'll sometimes pause dramatically and then cry out, "God damn!" Recently, on account of all the trouble in Algeria, a report got into circulation out here that De Gaulle was going to remove fifteen thousand French from North Africa and ship them to Tahiti and settle them here. To keep things in balance, it was said, fifteen thousand native Tahitians would be yanked out of their thatched houses and transported to New Caledonia. The chiefess heard this report and believed it. She went storming down to the Governor's office and demanded the right to see him. They knew her. They said the Governor wasn't in, that lie had been called to France for conferences on devaluation and reciprocity

and the Dreyfus case. But back of a door Madame Rosa heard the Governor's voice and she went busting through that door and marched up to his desk and gave him a French dressing down. He had a difficult time convincing her that the Algerian report was untrue.

From time to time various helpful people have asked me if I know the famous story about Lala Hall. Lala Hall is Mrs. James Norman Hall, widow of the writer. She is usually acclaimed as the most charming and most entertaining woman in the South Seas and everyone says it is a shame that she is traveling in foreign lands and that we haven't had the opportunity of meeting her. At least half a dozen of her friends have offered to tell me "the famous story" and then each of them has said, "Don't use it." They say that Lala Hall is sensitive about it and doesn't want it published.

This is the way it goes:

Several years ago Mrs. Hall got word from California that an important American writer was coming to Tahiti, aboard one of the Matson ships, and would call on her as soon as the ship docked, and it was requested that she show him every courtesy.

On the appointed day Mrs. Hall summoned her old friend Jeanne Jacquemin to assist her in making the visitor welcome and the two of them awaited him at the Hall residence in Arue.

Back at the waterfront the ship docked and an assistant chief engineer, new to the Tahiti run, got off and walked up to a native taxi driver. "Take me," he said, "to the whorehouse." Possibly because there is no *l* in the Tahitian language, the taxi driver thought the ship's officer said, "Take me to the Hall house." So he took him to the Hall house.

The visitor was greeted at the door by Lala Hall and Madame Jacquemin and they escorted him to a comfortable chair in the living room. He sat down and gazed all about the room and said to himself, "Well, by god now, they really know how to put it on out here. Some place." Then he said, "How about a drink? Make it bourbon." Mrs. Hall and Madame Jacquemin thought this rather abrupt, but the hostess hurried out to fix the drink. The officer was enjoying himself and the three engaged in small talk for a while and then the visitor began showing signs of restlessness. He asked for another drink and wondered where the hell the girls were. He thought, surely these two couldn't be . . . no, of course not. And then another car arrived and a second man appeared at the doorway and this was the American writer. The lovely contretemps stood revealed and the engineer took his departure and there was laughter on the slopes of Arue.

That's the famous story about Lala Hall. And why would I print it in the face of all those requests that I *not* print it? For one reason, it has already appeared, in an abbreviated version, in an American

magazine. For another, Lala Hall tells it herself to anyone who will hold still and listen. For still another, it is no reflection on her, not in the slightest. And finally, Lala Hall was the wife for many years of a professional writer, and ought to have some idea about the value of a good story.

At Bill Stone's house today I remarked that I have no thermometer at Maison Louise and therefore never have any idea how hot it is. Bill said that he went twenty years without knowing the temperature, then someone sent him a thermometer and he has been suffering from the heat ever since. He told me the mercury has been hovering around ninety for the last week or so.

January 5

THERE ARE two troublesome bottlenecks in Papeete, the post office and the bank. The post office is small and understaffed and the job of getting manuscripts and other packages off to the United States can take up half a day of standing around. That is, it takes me a half a day because I am timid in the presence of pushy women and usually let them push ahead of me. So, most of the time I let my wife take care of mailing things, for she is adept at pushing back. The situation at the bank is almost as bad. In both cases, however, new and bigger quarters are being made ready. The new post office adjoins the old and faces the waterfront. The new bank building, just now being finished, is a modernistic edifice with the style of a joss house and stands between the old wooden structure and the moss-covered cathedral.

This afternoon Godefroy de Noailat and I drove out to Bengt Danielsson's house and found him entertaining a Japanese anthropologist, a little woman with thick glasses who hisses when she talks and bows from the waist when she's introduced to strangers. She is planning on six months of research in the Tuamotus. She speaks French but little English and dresses like a high-school freshman of a generation ago. Her dress was a sort of middy blouse and she had on a simple straw hat with a black ribbon hanging down behind. As a courtesy in my direction she tried to use English in her conversation with de Noailat and their talk concerned the citizenship problems of the local Chinese. Her pronunciation of the word "citizenship" was most unfortunate, though it didn't seem to bother de Noailat, whose English is adequate but not sufficient for him to recognize this kind of mismanagement on the part of a Jap. She used the word "citizenship" over and over, and although I am not a vulgar person, I found it necessary to turn my head away from time to time. I noticed, too, that Mr. Danielsson was smiling.

By now I am calling him Bengt. Everyone who comes to Tahiti seeking information pays him a visit. He gets them all. I told him that he apparently gives away more than he keeps for himself, and I suggested that he ought to do a book about vagabond writers of the South Seas. A better book, he said, would be one about vagabond anthropologists, because the Pacific is swarming with them. Most of them are trying to prove that their own native lands were responsible for the original Polynesians. All this rafting around, and now the Japs are convinced that the first Tahitians were Nipponese. The only people who haven't made a claim so far are the Pennsylvania Dutch. Bengt got out a copy of the magazine *Pacific Islands Monthly*, a publication

whose value is already known to me, and showed me an editorial scolding the Pacific anthropologists, accusing them of having preconceptions about native behavior, and accusing them of making a bad personal impression on the general public wherever they go. The magazine recommends that all anthropologists adopt a progressive three-point program, to wit: (1) wash; (2) shave; and (3) wear pants.

Bengt is presently at work on at least three books. One is a factual history of the *Bounty*, in which he hopes to correct the impression of Captain Bligh given the world by Nordhoff and Hall and Charles Laughton. A second book is concerned with Paul Gauguin's years in the South Pacific. Bengt is a great hand at searching out errors in the books of other writers and he showed me a fat biography of Gauguin written by an English couple. "I have found, and marked, exactly one thousand errors of fact in this book" he said. "It is not an easy thing to do, to make one thousand errors in one book. It takes great concentration, steady industry, hard application and an acquaintanceship with numerous questionable sources. But these Britishers managed to bring it off."

It is great fun to find mistakes in the works of professional authors. I do it, and I am subjected to it. In one of my recent books I called a baby deer a faun. Letters came from all over the United States cackling over my error. A couple of days ago a woman who is one of Bengt Danielssons closest friends said to me that all books about the South Pacific are a jumble of errors except for books written by Bengt. Nobody but Bengt, she said, is capable of writing an accurate book about Tahiti. This woman was, in effect, telling me that my own book would be a jumble of errors. So I found it necessary to point out a few errors in Bengt's most famous book, *Love in the South Seas*. I dealt only with those errors which appear in the opening pages. Bengt uses the story of the plantation manager who was accustomed to taking out his glass eye and placing it on a stone beside a field where native laborers were working, and then going off to town with the assurance that the natives would continue at their jobs without interruption. I first met with this story in a book about Haiti, written thirty-five years ago. Bengt quotes the famous prose poem saluting Hawaii and says that its author, Mark Twain, "clearly for once in his life was both serious and deeply moved . . ." This would indicate that Bengt knows very little about Mark Twain, who was deadly serious about everything and deeply moved by many things. He tells about the first wheelbarrows introduced to the islands by the missionaries and how, after loading them, the natives lifted them onto their backs and carried them around. This story belongs to Mexico, in the time of the building of the first railways.

These discrepancies appear in the early pages of Bengt's book and I

mention them not as a criticism of him, but in reply to the woman who suggested that we are all fumbling fools with the sole exception of the bearded Swede. As a final note, I would like to suggest that even Bengt's title is an error — *Love in the South Seas*. It clearly should be *Sex in the South Seas*. The book is not about love. Here in Polynesia love is not an essential element in the sex act. Not at all. Bengt himself writes at great length on this point and I have long contended that the same principle prevails in my own civilized land. "He made love to her" is often a laughable misstatement of fact. No pollster will ever likely find out the percentage of Americans who engage in the sex act where there is no love involved, where a mutual distaste and even hatred exists. Our romantic standards, as expressed in our novels and motion pictures, are looked upon as idiotic by the Polynesians. For example, in this land the heart is not the seat of human emotion — it is the stomach. If we were truly and realistically intelligent we would change all our popular songs concerned with the heart, as for example: "Zing Went the Strings of My Stomach," "Sweet Stomach of Sigma Chi," "My Stomach Stood Still," "My Stomach Belongs to Daddy," "Be Still My Stomach," "Peg o' My Stomach," "You Belong to My Stomach," "I'll Follow My Secret Stomach," "The Curse of an Aching Stomach," and "Two Stomachs in Three-Quarter Time."

From Bengt's place we moved on to the nearby residence of Carlos Garcia-Palacios, a Chilean journalist who was long associated with the United Nations and who has noteworthy achievements in other fields. He is the Chilean consul in Tahiti, with not a single Chilean to consul. Bengt Danielsson is the Swedish consul. He has only one Swede to represent and he can never find him, for he is a nature man living alone in the jungles, hiding from people. Bengt has gone looking for him several times, out of a sense of duty, and once came within shouting range of him, and threw a handful of coins toward him, but that's as near as he ever got to servicing his lone national. Carlos Palacios is a friend of many important people, including such disparate characters as Eugene Burdick and Marlon Brando, and he asked me to come and visit him as often as possible, suggesting that he might be of help to me. His *vahine*, Agnes (pronounced Ann-yess), is an authentic Tahitian beauty who paints impressionistic paintings without knowing what an impressionistic painting is. She has a fairly fat part in the new *Bounty* movie, playing the wife of one of the principal mutineers.

Bengt Danielsson's nature man is not as colorful as Bill Stone's. Bill's is a Frenchman and since he lives closer to Papeete than any of the others, and conducts himself in a more eccentric manner, he is the island's most celebrated anchorite. His home is the ultimate in functional architecture — a simple sheet of roofing iron, six by four,

propped against a tree. Whenever he gets tired of his present location he simply picks up the sheet of iron and moves it to another tree. In wet weather he stays under the iron and sleeps. Bill Stone has written of him: "He squats upon his heels with his left hand clasping his right shoulder and his head buried in the crook of his arm somewhat in the manner of a roosting bird." He is a true beachcomber, and so whiskered that his features are completely hidden. In the hottest weather he wears the same costume, made of old copra sacks wrapped around his body, his legs and his arms, and tied with sennit. He roves the beach in the neighborhood of Bill's house, picking up such things as old sardine cans, corks, bottle caps, bits of paper, broken ukulele strings and chicken feathers. The great mystery is what happens to all this junk. He picks it up, day after day, and carries it back to his lean-to, but nobody knows what happens to it after that. It can't be stored inside his house, and the ground around his sheet of iron is always swept dean. I suggested to Bill that maybe he takes it somewhere and buries it, that he sees his mission in life to be that of a sanitary agent, commissioned by the Almighty to keep things tidy. "You can call him anything else you want," said Bill, "but please don't call him sanitary."

January 6

OUT THE Broom Road once again today. Someone has told me that there is a movement afoot to do away with the highway's historic name and substitute Route Ceinture. Broom Road is a name invented by the English devils, and therefore has no poetic feeling in it, whereas *ceinture* is a nice French word, meaning girdle or waistband. I am too far committed. I'll stick with Broom. This time I took Nelle to meet Carlos Palacios and Agnes, and from them we heard the story of the rehabilitation of Emile Gauguin.

Close to the Palacios house is a little grass shack occupied by an American businessman and his divorced wife. The wife is French and dabbles in both painting and writing while the husband is engaged in something called the salvage business in an American city. They were divorced a few years back and now have come out to this romantic clime to see if they can make a go of it again. Making a go of it can take up quite a bit of time, but there has to be something else to do, so they hit upon the idea of rescuing the son of the great Paul Gauguin from a life of sin and degradation.

These people, the Singletons, went to the French authorities with their plan, asking for the right to take Emile Gauguin out of jail three days a week, haul him out to their house on the beach, and there teach him how to paint. They agreed to pay him three hundred francs a day, feed him well, and not give him any Hinano. Permission was granted and the great experiment began.

The moment I heard of this affair I said I wanted to find out more about it. I wanted to watch the Singletons teaching big fat Emile how to paint like his papa. I asked if Emile were having a lesson today and Carlos sent his little brown boy over to snoop and find out. The boy came back and said that Emile was there, and I proposed going right over. Carlos recommended that I do no such thing. This Singleton character, he said, is in good physical shape and has a mean disposition to go with it and would likely punch me right in the nose if I set foot on his property and began prying into his affairs. The Singletons are trying to keep the project a secret. They believe that people would laugh at them and accuse them of having base intentions. Well, I would not laugh at them. What if it turned out that Emile can paint as well as Grandma Moses? He could make a million dollars. I mean the Singletons could make a million dollars. And that is nothing to laugh at.

I have no desire to be punched in the nose by a salvage person and so, for the time being, I let the matter of Emile's painting lessons rest, and listened to Carlos Palacios lecture entertainingly on Tahiti nuki.

He said that Tahiti is truly a Paradise, but only for old men.

“When you see young men come to Tahiti,” Carlos said, “it can only mean that they are rich or they are bums. If they are rich they come here because they can’t think of anyplace else to go. They don’t need to come to Tahiti to get *vahines*. They can get *vahines* anywhere in the world. If they are bums, they know they cannot find work here and so they will not get *vahines*. It is the old men like me who get the choice *vahines*. Look at Agnes here. Could you beat that anywhere else?”

He spoke of the many unattached women who come out here “because they want to bite the apple of life.” He enjoys telling stories about such women, especially if they come to grief while biting the apple of life. He said that recently a staff nurse off one of the cruise ships met a Tahitian boy whose burnished body made women ache all the way down to their corn plasters. This was what that nurse wanted out of life. She and the native boy lit into the highland jungles for the purpose of biting the apple of life in concert. The captain of the ship felt responsible for the girl and organized an expedition among his room stewards and bartenders and assistant pursers and this little band of hardy Americans began beating the bush. They finally came back with the girl, but they had to drag her every step of the way. She wanted to stay in the hills. She said she liked the way that native boy played his guitar. Back at the ship all members of the rescue squad had to be put to bed. They bore scratch marks from the shrubbery and from the nurse. There are no snakes in Tahiti but they said they saw snakes fifteen feet long. There are no anthropoid apes on the island but one assistant purser said he just barely escaped from a gorilla as big as a brewery horse.

Charles Petras, the newspaperman, and his Chinese wife, Claire, who is one of Tahiti’s top dressmakers, dined with us tonight at Chapiteau, the best restaurant in Papeete. I asked Charles if he knew what Emile Gauguin is doing these days, and he said Emile is serving a term in the prison. Apparently he doesn’t know about the Singleton business.

Charles tried to set me straight on the proposition of the French government versus the Tahitian Assembly. Americans who live here, and many who come on yachts, complain bitterly about the red tape and the road blocks they encounter on every side. They almost always blame the French *fonctionnaires*. They assume incorrectly that all the petty regulations were invented by the French to make life unpleasant for Americans. Charles and other Frenchmen tell me that the Territorial Assembly, which is composed of Tahitians, is actually responsible for most of the trouble. The laws and regulations come out of the Assembly and the French are required to enforce them. It’s as

simple as that.

(Later I told this to a prominent American resident and he exploded. "That's a lot of crap," he cried. "The French Governor can veto anything the Assembly does. The French Governor is a dictator and a tyrant and I'd strangle him with my bare hands if I got the chance." Still later I told a Frenchman what the angry American had said, and he burst into flame. "Ziss American," he said, "is ready for the bubbly hatch." Thus it goes in Tahiti. Thus it goes around the world.)

Chapiteau restaurant is an upstairs place and while we were enjoying our steaks there came a clattering on the stairway and into the room burst a party of six couples. Four of the men had black beards. Ah, I said, the anthropologists have arrived. No, said Charles, these six men are all dentists of Tahiti. I watched the bearded ones for a while and there was no indication that their women felt a revulsion for their whiskers. This is a modern paradox. I have observed that most girls shudder in the presence of a beard, and say they would never kiss its owner, and certainly never bed down with him. On the other hand, the bearded men themselves tell me that they'd cut the thing off except that their women will not permit it. Their women, they say, grow doubly passionate in the presence of whiskers. I have even heard it stated that a man with a beard is very likely a sexual deviate. I'm sure this is not true of those dentists. Judging from the general condition of teeth in Tahiti, these men don't have anything else to do, so they just sit around and grow whiskers.

January 7

AURORA took us today to visit the old Harrison Smith place. Harrison Smith was a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was a bachelor whose great love was for flowers and one day he walked away from engineering and went to the South Seas. He was a small man with a Vandyke beard and he almost always wore a little white hat of nautical styling and this led to his being called Skipper Smith. He spent some years in Borneo and then came to Tahiti and acquired a big tract of land far down the west coast of the island. He brought hundreds of varieties of flowers and trees to Tahiti and set them out on his jungle plantation. He encouraged the natives in his district to plant flowering trees and shrubs along the highway and the success of that project is apparent today to anyone who drives through the neighborhood. The caretaker of the plantation, up at the little house where Skipper Smith lived beside the lagoon, gave us a mimeographed list of all the flowers and plants and trees to be seen on the property and we went crashing into the jungles to look at as many as possible. I was most impressed by the Burmese bamboo, an immense clump as stalwart and towering as a five-story bank building. The greatest contribution of Harrison Smith, to my own mind, was the importation of the pomelo grapefruit, which is called *pamplemousse* on the menus of Tahiti. The story goes that in 1919 Smith was aboard a coastal steamer off Borneo. The captain of the vessel was in need of a haircut and his cabin boy was trying to give him one. The captain was storming and cursing and Harrison Smith heard the uproar and thought of the barber's clippers he had in his luggage. He got the clippers and took them to the captain. The cabin boy fumbled around with them for a while, the captain cursed some more, and Smith took over and gave the mariner a handsome haircut. The captain was so pleased that he presented Smith with a crate of pomelo grapefruit, and from this came the seeds he took with him to Tahiti. There is an appreciable difference between the grapefruit we know at home and the *pamplemousse* of Tahiti. Almost every American tourist exclaims over the Tahitian variety, except one gentleman who ate at the next table to us at the Hotel Tahiti for several days. Every time he picked up the menu he would say, "Well, I see we got purple mouse on the bill of fare again." It was all right the first time he said it.

Harrison Smith has been dead for many years. His plantation is now owned by Cornelius Crane, who also owns a big home back up the road at Kilometer 25. Crane is a wealthy American with scientific interests and maintains his property here, although he hasn't been in Tahiti for four years. His Japanese wife is a talented musician and in

the time she was living here spent several hours each day playing the piano. She played the classical music of the great German composers, and a Tahitian gardener on the estate became very fond of it without knowing what it was. Then one day Mrs. Crane began playing two or three Tahitian numbers. After several days of this the Tahitian gardener came to her, hat in hand, and said: "Please do not play those common Tahiti songs any more, please go back to that beautiful Japanese music."*

** Cornelius Crane died in New England six months after the above was written.*

I must mention the poem that Charles Nordhoff wrote celebrating the botanical accomplishments of Harrison Smith, who was his friend. The poem concerns Smith's importation of the royal durian, a fruit which, Nordhoff wrote, grows hair on bald heads and makes each man need a hundred wives. The poem concludes:

*So men whose hair is sparse and grey
Should travel east without delay,
In ships, canoes, or boats -
To eat the fruit that fires the mild -
The fruit that helps the growing child -
The fruit that makes tame women wild,
And old men skip like goats.*

James Norman Hall also knew Harrison Smith and, in fact, at one time worked for him, helping catalogue the botanical specimens on the plantation. Both Hall and Nordhoff had many years of tough going before they struck gold with the *Bounty* story. Hall never learned to drive a car and always traveled by bicycle. In those early days he would pedal thirty or forty miles out to the Harrison Smith place to work, or even further to Robert Keable's house, where he sometimes did typing for the English novelist.

From the Harrison Smith place we drove on around to Faratea restaurant for lunch and then on up the scenic east coast. Approaching Point Venus we left the highway and drove about a mile to the lagoon and inspected the site of the native village which M-G-M built and then we wandered around the premises of a two-story concrete house a short distance away. This mansion, Aurora said, was true French colonial in style and Marlon Brando lived in it. All of the houses Brando lived in, pounding the mattresses to shreds, are proudly pointed out to tourists. This particular mansion, however,

was something more than the others. For about ten years it was the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Curtis, who gave parties on the same scale as the Guilds on the opposite side of the island. The Curtises were horsey people, and Mrs. Curtis had been an opera singer in Europe. She was a lyric soprano but it wasn't her fault. These people lived a life of colonial splendor at Mahina, as the plantation was called, and left their mark on the island.

When we got home Aurora dug out her notes and gave me the details of an expedition undertaken a few years ago by three Easter Island boys. These boys had little knowledge of the sea, and no knowledge whatever of navigation, but they decided that they wanted to go to Tahiti and see those girls and so they made their plans. They stole an old whaleboat and provisioned it with salted mutton and corn and bananas and water. Somehow they managed to acquire a cheap tin compass. Then they went to an old fisherman who had, many years earlier, been to Tahiti, and they asked him for some instruction in navigation. He gave it to them in simple terms. He told them to travel straight north for eight days, then take a sharp left and keep going till they saw two islands. Ignore the smaller one, said the old fisherman, and make for the bigger one — that would be Tahiti. And so the three boys set sail in the dead of night, and made the left turn as ordered, and after one month of seasickness they banged up against a reef in the Tuamotus, having traveled 2140 miles. They were hauled in to Papeete by schooner and the police were ready to ship them out at once when the Governor got wind of their adventure. He said that if they wanted to see Tahiti that badly, they would be permitted to stay around for a while. They had a real good time. With girls.

January 8

AT DONALD - Tahiti's famous waterfront store this morning I bought a new supply of envelopes and, needing a refill for my ballpoint, I went through an elaborate pantomime so the lady clerk would know what I was after. She watched me all the way through and then said, "You desire refill Papermate?" She had some difficulty getting to it because the upper part of a Tahitian girl was sprawled all over the top of the counter and the flat case containing the ballpoint accessories. This girl was writing a letter and the lady clerk didn't ask her to move so I cleared my throat a couple of times and then gave her a nudge. She looked up, innocently, and then went on with her writing. I finally spoke to her sharply and she moved.

We next walked over to the magazine store on the Broom Road to see if any American stuff had come in. In this store the magazines are stacked on a large table in the center of the room. There were two Tahitians spread-eagled over this table, making it impossible for us to see what was available. This is standard practice in the magazine store as in other stores. The Tahitians come in, pick out a comic book or a movie fan magazine, and have a good read for themselves right there on the table. I am all for the life of ease but in this matter the temptation is strong to take hold of the Tahitian and, in the southern Illinois phrase, jerk a knot in his tail (I'm not sure this would work with a Chinese). I have been told lately, however, that the proper procedure is to give the offending party a good hard shove — hurling him dear across the room if necessary—whereupon he will take the hint, and he will not be offended. "The simple way is the way things are always done in Tahiti," my informant said.

A block back of this magazine store is the Nicolas Boucherie, which has been recommended as a fair sort of butcher shop, so we went in there to get some nice scraggy, purple beef. A heavyset barefooted woman in a white smock runs this shop and is a cheerful person in spite of the horrible flesh that hangs all around her (I am not speaking of *her* flesh, but of her merchandise). In foggy English she asked how we liked Tahiti and how long we were staying and where we were from. When we said we were from New York she said that was a place with much schnay, no? She asked us if we like schnay. She said there is never any schnay in Tahiti but that in Alsoss, where she comes from, they have plenty of schnay. She said, "Me like schnay plenty much," and she made a gesture indicating that she likes her schnay in drifts three or four feet deep. Nelle and I don't like schnay.

Somebody told us about a grocery named Cecile's where they have

good things but we had difficulty locating it. We asked various Chinese merchants in downtown Papeete and they made big waves with their hands, indicating that the store was far away, eastward, possibly in South America. Then a Tahitian told us that Cecile's is "by Mo Mo Sing House," and I went somewhere else and got that translated into Mormon Temple. This temple is a grand building on a small scale, and stands in the most populous residential district of Papeete — a district, incidentally, which tourists should see and don't. So we located Cecile's and found it to be much like other Tahitian grocery stores, and so we drove around a long time looking at houses and the Mormon Temple and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. This district lies only a short distance from our house and I would say that three-fourths of the people of Papeete live in it.

The Mormons are quite active in Tahiti and there are two factions, each with its own church. The Splintered Mormons have their church at the eastern end of the waterfront while the Salt Lake City Mormons maintain their white temple about a mile away. There are quite a few lay missionaries of the Mormon Church roaming around Tahiti and they can always be identified from the fact that they wear bow ties in a land where the mere possession of a necktie is almost a felony. I have some interesting notes about the Mormon religion, taken from the book written by George Calderon, who was here in 1906. This Calderon made the acquaintance of a Mormon missionary who was in Tahiti at a time when his religion was fairly young. The Englishman asked this missionary to summarize the beliefs of his church. It was my intention to set down that summary here, but now I've changed my mind. Told in straightforward prose, in the words of that 1906 missionary, the story of Joseph Smith and the golden plates and Urim and Thummin and the Angel Moroni — it all sounds utterly ridiculous, so much so that a mud turtle would blush to believe any of it. There is an undertone of ridicule in George Calderon's presentation of the case. I don't know what he believed in the way of religion, but I'd venture to say that I could take his particular faith — if he had one — and write out its main features in two or three hundred words, without stretching the truth, and it would sound just as stupid as Mormonism sounds in his book. I am no mud turtle, but I still blush when I think of the fantastic things I believed when I was a boy.

George Calderon also wrote of the transplanted Pitcairn Islanders who were still colonized in Tahiti at the time of his visit. Their little colony was on the eastern edge of Papeete. "They have long faces," he wrote, "and 'high cheek-bones and small, needly eyes, and they are always laughing. . . . Their religion is Seventh Day Adventism — that is, they keep Saturday holy and believe that it is on a Saturday that

Christ will come again. They feed on nuts and fruits, eschewing meat, tobacco and wine. When the Pitcairn Islanders first became religious they studied the Bible and the Prayer Book with all their might (the mutineers had a copy of each aboard) and believed everything in both, maintaining all the Jewish as well as all the Christian observances. This made them very broad-minded, and they have since been ready to accept every new religion that came along, provided it involved self-sacrifice and asceticism enough.”

I have always thought of Seventh Day Adventism as having a big advantage over other religions; you are required to rest on Saturdays out of religious conviction, and on Sundays because the rest of the world is resting and nothing is open.

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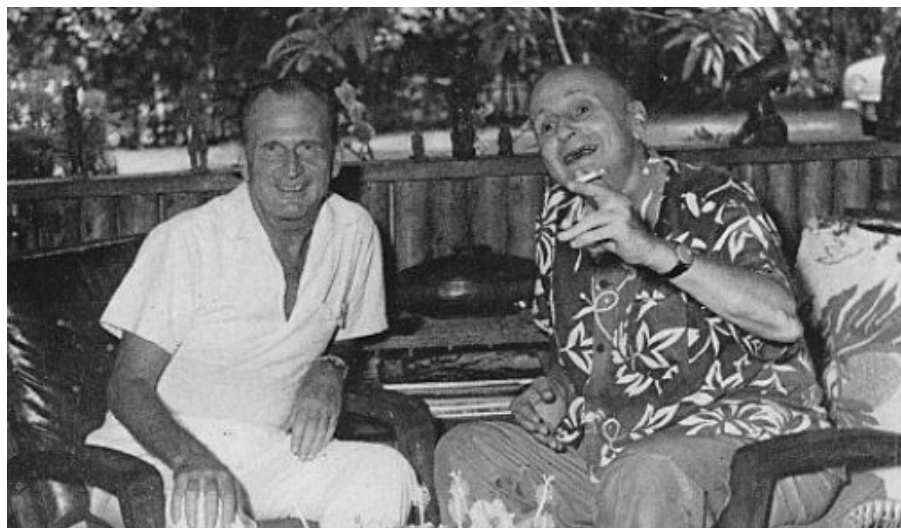
Author with Captain Stone, a ship's captain who, like all ship's captains, looks remarkably like the captain of a ship.



A side view of Maison Louise, where the waxing was done by foot.



Here are the Smiths hard at work at Bar Vaima, Tahiti's Institute for Advanced Study.



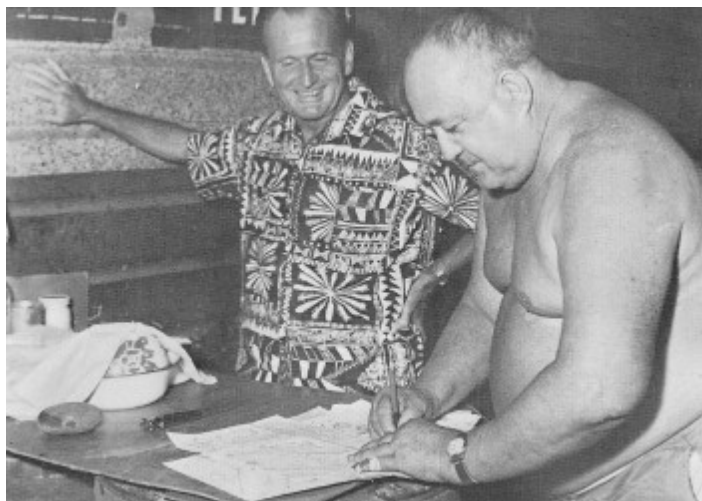
Carlos Palacios, the Chilean consul bereft of Chileans, plays host on his lanai (front porch).



*Author on the left is Ralph Varady, who once hanged himself bt the neck.
Author on the right may get it done for him by others.*



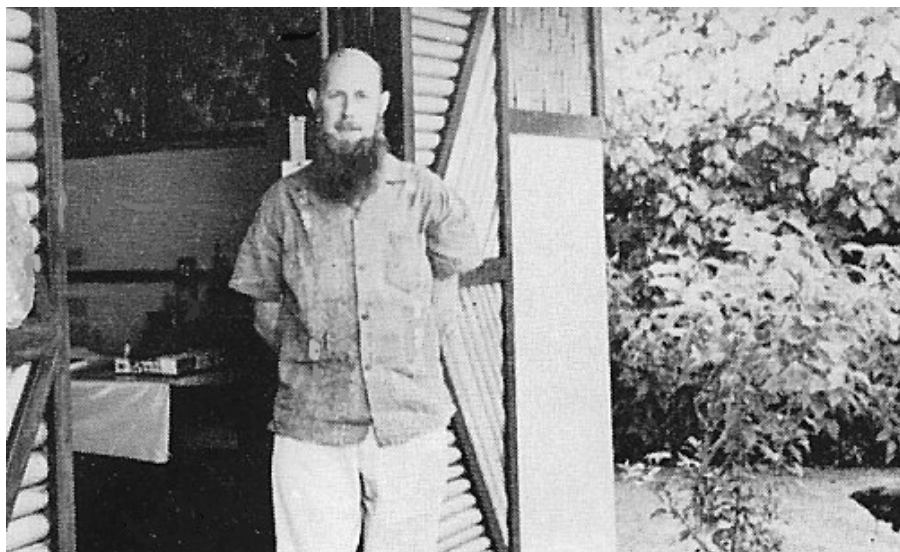
An American author ponders the strange moral contained in the book by Pierre Loti. That's Pierre clowning it up on top of the pedestal.



Here is Emile Gauguin, clad in a lovely wrist watch, signing his work, Fille qui Danse dans la Rue (Vahine Who Dances in the Street) in the presence of the purchaser.



Un Drole de Cheval Qui Gronde (A Peculiar Horse Who Snarls), the masterpiece executed under commission for the author by Emile Gauguin.



Bengt Danielsson, known to the natives as "Upside-Down Face."



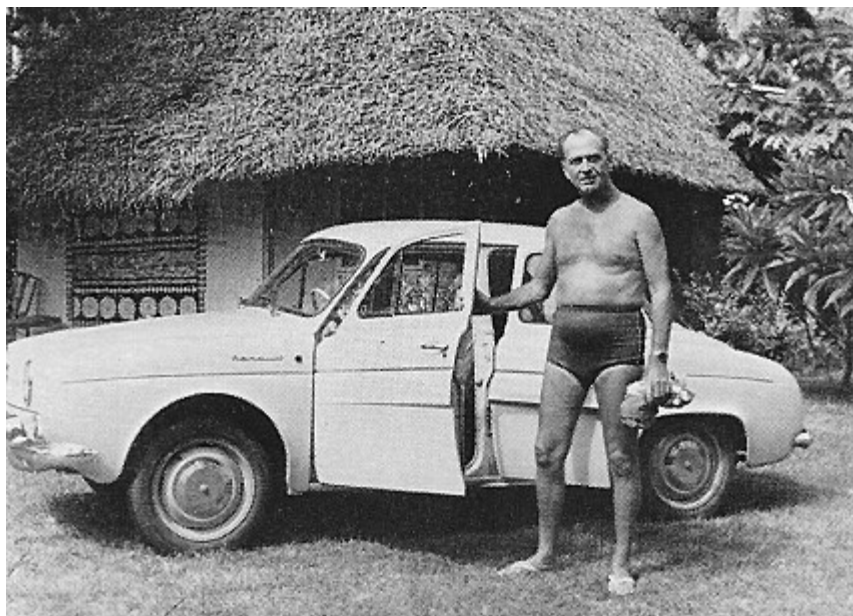
Bill Stone, ex-pilot, author, and lawyer, who found out that there are no wheelbarrows in heaven.



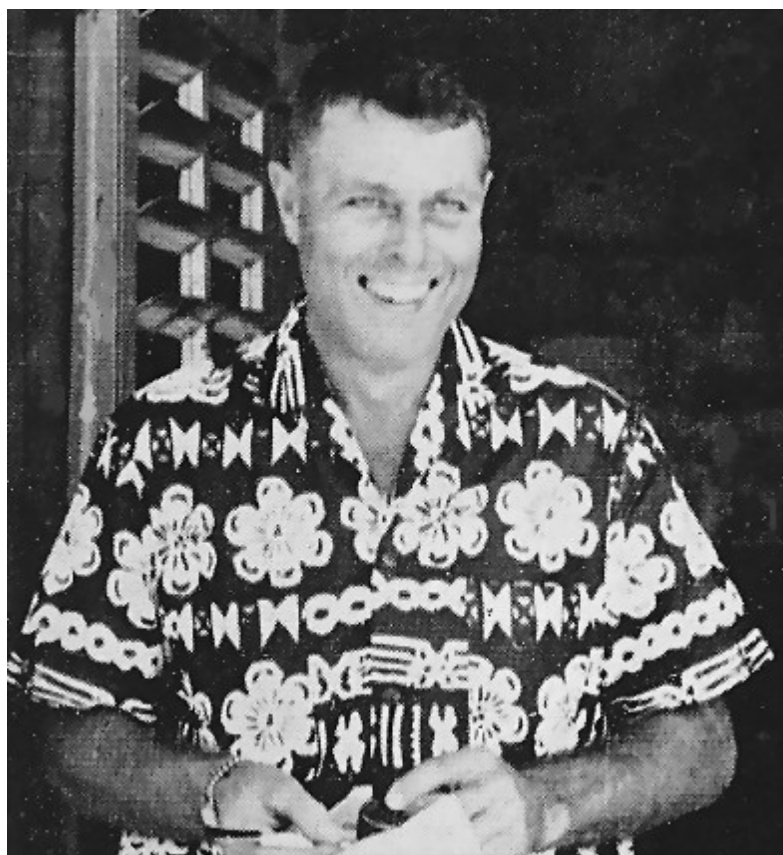
Here is Baldwin, who sometimes suffers from vahines, vegetables and go-ahead toe.



Ripley Gooding, who considers all writers to be cock-a-roaches and who may be right, and is. Pictured in his hotel-building costume with a cock-a-roach.



House of Carlos Palacios, Dauphine of Dave Cave, and a rejuvenated American. Photo illustrates the type of work I do.



Dave Cave, stepfather to four dozen Dauphines and admirer of Napoleon's Tomb.



Aurora Natua, our Tahitian scholar and guide who pronounces all the letters in the word "doubt."



With Agnes, the part-time movie actress who paints impressionistic things without knowing she's doing it. This photo illustrates the type of work I do.



This is Onna of the Australs, who put ginger blossoms on my typewriter.



This was later in Australia, but somehow it got mixed in here, which is all right because it shows the correct way to hold a kangaroo.



That's Papeete and the harbor in the background, and the white line in the coral reef, haunt of the hideous nohu.

January 9

TODAY WE stopped in at Papeete's cemetery which is on the road out to the Hotel Tahiti. Once inside the gate I began searching for the mausoleum of the Hirshon family, for that is where the body of Edgar Leeteg reposes. It is time we considered the story of Leeteg.

The cemetery is on a sloping hill and after half an hour of climbing around I found the white crypt. Inside was a temporary plate to indicate that the body of Lew Hirshon was there, but the name Leeteg was nowhere in sight. There is yet no epitaph for the wildest eccentric ever to hit Tahiti's shore, though Leeteg himself composed the tender sentiment he said he wanted on his gravestone: "That fornicating, gin-soaked dopehead, The Moron of Moorea."

Edgar Leeteg, who was the first and the foremost of the black velvet artists, came to Tahiti in 1930 on a six-month vacation, went home with a dose of clap and ever afterward had a warm affection for the South Pacific. The full story of his cyclonic career in Tahiti and on the island of Moorea has been told by James Michener and A. Grove Day in their book *Rascals in Paradise*. It is the contention of Michener and Day that Leeteg set out deliberately to make a legend of his name, in the same way that Paul Gauguin, through years of carousing with liquor and dames, became a South Seas legend. This theory about Leeteg is bolstered by his own words in letters to his friends. He declared that his hellraising would serve "to perpetuate my memory for years to come." And he wrote: "I have boozed more, fought more, laid more girls, and thrown more wild parties than anyone else on the island, but it's all good publicity and gets me talked about plenty, and that's what sells pictures." There is something appealing about a man who reverses the Alger formula and seeks fame and fortune in the world, sink or swim, struggling upward, through luck and pluck, and by violating as many of the Ten Commandments as is possible.

Leeteg was killed one wild night in 1953 when he was thrown off a motorcycle. The accident occurred after a big party at Les Tropiques Hotel. It is known that Leeteg was riding on the rear perch of a motorcycle driven by a friend; yet nobody can tell me today exactly where he was killed. The two men were on their way to the eastern side of Papeete, to continue their party at a place called the Lido. Some say the accident occurred near the lido, others say it was near the entrance to the Royal Tahitian. Ripley Gooding thinks it was on the old bridge near the prison, but he isn't positive. I think maybe everybody in Tahiti was drunk that night.

The picture of Leeteg's weekly arrival in Papeete from his home on

Moorea, as given by Michener and Day, is disputed by some of the artist's friends but I suspect it is actually all true. Leeteg was a short, stout man, only five feet three inches tall, but he was always able to make himself look big when a camera was trained on him — he stood or sat in such a position that he looked larger than his companions. He wore a big planter's hat and talked like an Ozark hillbilly. He was born in East Saint Louis in my own section of Illinois and thus had a fine background for the cultivation of rascality and sinfulness. He began as a billboard painter and even when his velvets were bringing as much as seven thousand dollars each, the critics said he was still a billboard painter. He was held in contempt by arty people and he responded in kind, writing violent and unprintable attacks on them. I don't care whether his work is art or not — it is attractive and even beautiful to my eye because of its luminosity and opulence. And I admire Leeteg himself because the man dearly belonged in that fabulous gang of Hollywood roisterers whose membership included John Barrymore, W. C. Fidds, Gene Fowler, John Decker and, yes, even Errol Flynn.

The only point in the Michener-Day portrait that appears to be wrong is the statement that Leeteg came from Moorea to Papeete every Tuesday, disposed of his business affairs, paid a sober visit to his three children (by a native wife) and then went roaring forth on the town. His friends say these debauches were not a weekly affair, that sometimes a month or more would elapse before the artist came to town. They say, too, that up to a point he was a fine drinking companion. It is true that he sometimes went ripping through the streets without a stitch of clothes on, in pursuit of a *vahine* just as naked; it is true that he often fell into the bay while trying to storm aboard various yachts along the waterfront; it is true that he gloried in fistfighting and that he held the admissions record in the outpatient department of the Papeete Hospital. But it is also true that back in Moorea, where he built the series of tiny houses which served as his home, he worked long days and weeks turning out his black velvets. Before he discovered what could be done with velour, he went through years of poverty in Tahiti, painting posters for a movie theater, picking up odd jobs here and there, sometimes actually going hungry. One woman told us that in those days Leeteg was the most disgusting sight in Tahiti — that he'd get drunk and wallow around in the dirt of the waterfront for days. Then along came a hot shot named Barney Davis of Honolulu and he took over as press agent for Leeteg and promoter of his work, hailing The Moron of Moorea as successor to Rembrandt, publicizing him as The American Gauguin.

When he first began painting on velvet Leeteg did portraits, some of his friends in Tahiti, and let them go for a few dollars. His friends

paid him for the work but looked upon the portraits as valueless and in many cases quietly threw them away. The early Leeteg heads as well as his gorgeous Tahitian nudes were offered for sale in little Chinese stores and if they were sold at all, they usually went to saloon keepers. Thus the story of Leeteg's early days does resemble the story of Paul Gauguin. Gauguin was a man of peccable tastes, much given to drinking and wenching. The small-headed normal people of his time in Tahiti could not believe that such a degraded person could produce anything worthwhile. And so, many of his works were thrown away or actually burned as junk. This has resulted in a special breed of modern-day aristocracy on the island, people who boast: "My grandfather burned up a million dollars' worth of Gauguin paintings." We have heard various people make this proud boast about their grandfathers, or some other of their forebears, and if all of them were telling the truth, then thousands of genuine Gauguins were destroyed in bonfires and more thousands were tossed into the lagoons.

The money rolled in for Leeteg in his later years. He threw a lot of it away, or gave it away, for he had a reputation as a man of great generosity. I'm not at all sure his body was in that white mausoleum, but that's where it was put after his funeral. Lew Hirshon, a prosperous member of the American colony in Tahiti, had been with Leeteg on the fatal night and though he didn't care much for the artist he took over the job of providing a funeral and burial place because nobody else seemed interested in doing it.

Leeteg may have achieved his aim and his name may be legendary now in the South Seas, but it is not easy to get accurate information about him. People who knew him well still don't know where he was killed, don't know if his body is still in that crypt, don't know much about his surviving family — except that his son Edgar works out at the airport.

Just a couple of days ago, driving in from Punaauia, I spotted young Edgar coming toward us on the highway, riding his motor bike. He was going at a brisk speed, his curly hair riffling in the wind, a grin on his handsome face. In a sportive manner he was swooping his bike from one side of the road to the other. "There he is," I said to Nelle, "that's Leeteg's boy." And on the instant the same thought occurred to us both.

January 10

TOURISTS who don't know any better are often alarmed when they see someone with elephantiasis in Tahiti. We encounter them frequently, both men and women, with one or both legs swollen to hideous proportions, so that they actually resemble the legs and hooves of elephants. It is only natural that a tourist would say, 'Well, give me cancer in preference to *that* any day.' But the disease, which is transmitted by a day-flying mosquito, is no longer a problem — except where the victim does nothing to help himself. It manifests itself in the beginning by a red streak on the skin, usually on the inner arm. All the victim needs do is go to a doctor and get a pill and that ends it. Or, if the disease should be contracted by a visitor from Europe or the United States, the victim needs only to go home — it dies out promptly in temperate zones and can flourish only in the tropics.

Bill Stone in his book *Tahiti Landfall* tells about a seance he once attended in Tahiti, at which most of those present were natives. Assorted spirits of the departed were being brought back for conferences with the living and finally a young man named Terii, who had been a friend of all those present, returned from Out Yonder. Terii had died of elephantiasis. One of his friends now had a question for him.

"Terii," he said, "are you still obliged to carry your manhood before you in a wheelbarrow?"

Terii said no. He said that in heaven there are no wheelbarrows.

I read Bill Stone's book before I left home, without knowing that later I would meet him and that we would become friends. His book is one of the best ever written about the Tahitians, and there are many fine incidents and anecdotes in it. When he first established himself in a grass shack on the beach and began writing, the natives were fascinated by his typewriter, which they called the *putta-putta*. Whole committees of them would call on Bill and ask him to please play the *putta-putta* for them. And among his characters was an ill-favored, quarrelsome old woman known to the natives as Madame Hupipi. English translation: Madame Bean Wind.

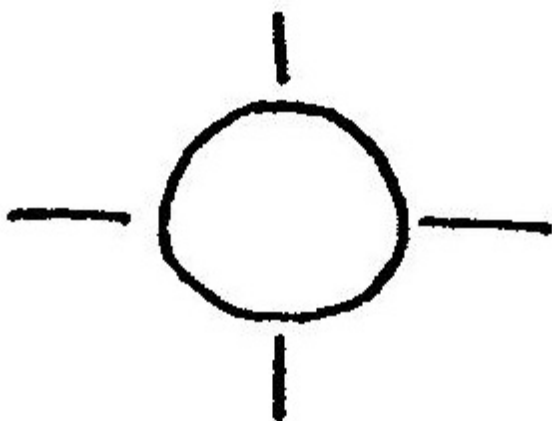
When this day began I still had no positive proof that Emile Gauguin is being hauled out to the Singleton house three times a week for painting lessons. I had Aurora telephone a French government official who had some connection with the prison and he denied the whole thing, said it was ridiculous to think that the government would permit such a thing. Still, I had no reason to doubt my new friend

Carlos Palacios and so I decided to nail the thing down one way or another. I went to de Noailat, the boss of *tourisme*, and stated my problem. He got on the phone and called the head Frenchman in charge of justice and injustice and in short order had the answer. It was true. Permission had been granted for the rehabilitation and regeneration of Emile Gauguin by the Singletons. They were paying him the three hundred francs for each day he spent with them. The arrangement was causing some unhappiness among the other prisoners who felt that favoritism was being shown, who said that they ought to be allowed to go to the seashore three days a week and get paid handsomely for it. I got the impression that the other inmates would soon be banging their tin cups on the tables if the Gauguin rehabilitation program continued much longer. The French official told de Noailat that the Singletons already have an offer for a Gauguin painting, an offer of one thousand francs, or about twelve dollars, from a patron of the arts in Paris.

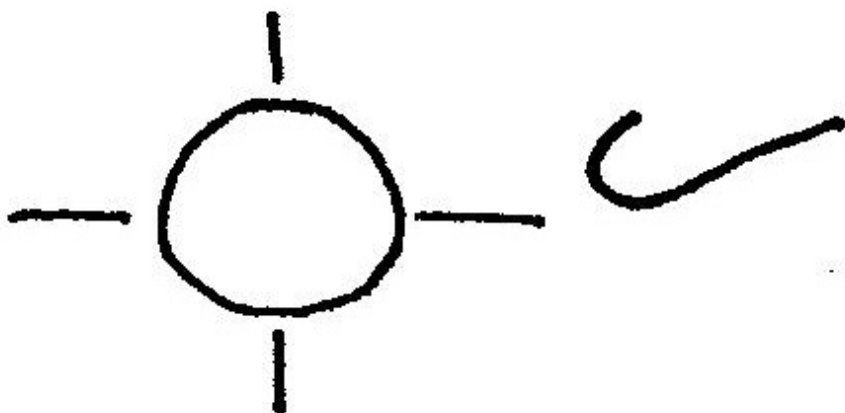
So there it was. I went around to Bar Vaima and reported the news and one lady said: "Rehabilitate him? How can you rehabilitate someone who was never habilitated in the first place?"

Up the street I caught sight of Bert Covit, a former United Press correspondent in the Mystic East, talking to a beautiful girl. I walked up there and Bert introduced me and said this poor girl has lost her passport and is in great anguish over it and I am doing my best to console her. So I asked her where she lost it, and she said she was German, out of Hamburg, and that she lost the passport in Panama a week or so ago. She said: "I sat down and drank one bottle whiskey because I know how much trouble would be." Bert then said to her: "I could get you in the movies. That might be a solution." She had big blue eyes and a wide mouth full of glistening white teeth, and reddish-brown hair bleached by the sun — an authentic sexpot of the Bardot stripe. She gave me the willies. I felt that I would enjoy performing the native rite of *kau kau tui tui* on her, which involves rubbing her whole body with chewed candle nut. Bert sensed the direction of my thinking and made it clear that he was hugging the rail on this one, and so I gave up, solacing myself with the thought that it was not the real me that was interested in this German girl; it was Old Doctor Tallien's medicine talking. About this time along came one of the town characters, a thin and wrinkled little Chinese man, perhaps forty years old, perhaps ninety, wearing a child's black cowboy hat with the word *bonanza* in gold letters across the crown. This man pads quietly around town, his eyes darting from side to side, and he picks up things. Nobody knows what he picks up. Possibly imaginary things. I trailed off after him and coming up behind him said, "Excuse me a moment." He turned and gave me a sad look and then hurried off. So I went and

found Nelle and we drove out to see Carlos and Agnes. Carlos sent his little brown boy on another scouting expedition to see if Emile was painting today. The boy reported nobody home so we sat around and talked about Emile. Then Agnes remembered that she owns a genuine Gauguin, and she went inside and found it. Emile had been telling her once how great and famous he was and so she asked him to paint a picture for her. She got him a sheet of paper and a pencil and he painted as follows:



Agnes took it from him and studied it and then said he should sign it, and he did, and the finished masterwork looked like this:



That thing over to the right is the signature. Carlos suggested that

this painting be designated as a Quite Early Gauguin. He thinks maybe Emile may improve a little under the tutelage of Mrs. Singleton.

January 11

THE SYMPHONY of Maison Louise includes the yelling of the mynahs, the softer songs of other birds, the clatter of the bamboo dump when a breeze arises, the thud of the coconuts hitting the turf, the clucking and crowing of the chickens, the distant whirring of the motorbikes on the Broom Road, and Louise's laughter. Louise cachinnates, in a sort of mezzo-soprano chortle. It is high-pitched and it travels and penetrates and is not unpleasant but, instead, rather infectious. We hear her laughter coming from within her house across the way and *we* start laughing. I was sitting today on the waterfront with her sister, Jeanne, when I heard that laugh and I turned quickly and spotted Louise down near the *Wanderer's* berth where she had just parked her car. That laugh carried a good fifty yards through the midday clamor of the quay.

I had been asking Jeanne Jacquemin about the late J. Frank Stimson, who lived for many years in Tahiti and was one of the most famous Americans ever to make his home here. He was a cousin of Henry L. Stimson. He was an anthropologist, a linguist, author of a Tahitian grammar, an architect who had once been associated with Stanford White, an insurance broker, an explorer, and a devout believer in ghosts. He was a graduate of Yale and hated white women.

Jeanne Jacquemin said she was once visiting in the old man's house and she told him she had heard of a poem he had written in tribute to his current *vahine*. He said yes, and got it out and read it to her, and in it he called his *vahine* a fragrant flower of the island, a tender little blossom of Tahiti, the whisper of a silvery waterfall in the mountains. Jeanne told him she thought it was a wonderful thing to happen to a girl, to have such a lovely poem written for her, and that she wished that when she was a young girl someone had written such a tribute to her. Frank Stimson nodded and his eyes grew misty, for he was full of romantic sentiment, and he said, yes, she is indeed a sweet and lovely creature, this incomparable *vahine*, and he wanted Jeanne to meet her. He called out the girl's name and in a moment she came slouching in from the kitchen, a tan slattern out of the Tuamotus, and there was anger in her face as she said to Stimson: "Now whatta hell you want, you old bum? Why you bother me alla time, you no-good?" And then she turned and walked back into the kitchen.

In the field of ethnology Stimson was often accused of being overly interested in sex, especially in his long investigations of life on the strange island of Raivavae. I am not as great a scientist as he was but I have the scientific approach to things. With that in mind, and considering my encounter with that German girl today, I feel that it is

time for me to report further on Old Doctor Tallien's pink pills and black tonic. I have not been taking any of the medicine lately but I have laid in a supply, using the original prescription. I am a very practical man and whenever I find myself in the vicinity of the *pharmacie* I go in and get some more. The effects of the first period of dosage, covering two weeks, are as strong as ever; the wild nanny goats of the mountainous interior had better keep their distance. And I am still beleaguered by aging gentlemen who beg me for the secret potion.

Sometimes even strangers. Recently a manufacturer from Ohio, who has been in Tahiti for about ten days and who looks to be sixty, arranged to have himself introduced to me at the Hotel Tahiti and without any preliminaries asked me about the Tallien medicines. I feigned ignorance, but this man said he knew the whole story.

"I'd like to get hold of some of that stuff," he said, "for use some time in the future. I figure that the day will come eventually when I might need a little assistance along that line. Not now, mind you. God-a-mighty, not now! But then a man should look to the future, and I heard about this stuff you got, and if I could just get the prescription, or the name of the stuff, and then have my doctor back home check it out, well . . . how about it, pal?"

I had to tell him that I had made a solemn promise and that anyway I didn't know if the stuff worked or not. I said I hadn't taken any of it, what the hell, I didn't need anything like that at my age, being at the peak of my powers, but that this doctor practically forced the prescription on me, I hadn't asked for it at all, and I had serious doubts that the stuff was any good.

"Well, then," said the Ohio man, "in that case why the hell don't you break down and let me have the name of the stuff?"

He kept after me so earnestly that finally I did tell him the name of the pills, and he said: "Sounds sorta Japanesy. The Japs know forty times what we know about this kind of thing." And then he excused himself, said he had a date with a travel agent downtown, and hurried off. I'd have bet good money he was on his way to the drugstore.

Nelle and I attended a session of the Territorial Assembly today. The Tahitian parliament meets on the second floor of a two-story wooden building which stands on the quay a few feet from the place where some of the big cruise ships tie up. As we were approaching the building I saw a Tahitian taxi driver I knew, leaning against the fender of his car. I went up to him to make certain about the location of the Assembly. "What they talk about today?" he wanted to know. I said I wasn't sure. "I wish I put bomb atomic and blow them all up to hell the bastards," he said. It is nice to have the common people take an interest in public affairs. When they concern themselves with

politics it is always a sign that they have reached a high degree of civilization, and that the democratic process is unexcelled anywhere on earth.

The big room where the legislators were already in session was not at all like any other legislative hall I had ever seen. It was furnished in the style of a small-town courtroom and microphones were used by the officers and delegates because of the waterfront clamor that came through the windows — the raspy shrieks of the winches that were unloading copra and other cargo. The assemblymen (and one woman) sat at a U-shaped table, about twenty-five of them altogether, all in shirtsleeves, some in flowered Tahitian shirts. At one side of the room green curtains cut off the glare from the sea, but through some other windows we could see the green hills above Papeete.

One delegate had a Chinese look. There was one redheaded man, a fierce-looking fellow who was nearsighted and spent his time holding documents up to his face, two or three inches from his eyes. Still another assemblyman appeared to be a doctor, for he was wearing the white jacket of the profession as if he had just rushed over from surgery. Nelle and I were the only people in the spectators' section and the assemblymen did a lot of neck-stretching in our direction.

Apparently nobody ever came to watch them at work. So I sat with a grave and studious mien and took many notes, hoping these people would think I was an undercover agent in the employ of General de Gaulle, sent here to find out what kind of hanky-panky was going on in the Territory, sent out to blow the lid off the whole corrupt colony. I returned their stares with a steely, steady gaze, and I sensed that they were shuddering inwardly because of my ominous presence. I like to disturb and frighten people in this manner — people like members of a legislature who, nine times out of ten, are as crooked as a dog's hind leg. I wouldn't be at all surprised if one or another of those assemblymen, arriving home tonight, said to his wife: "Well, my dear, this has been a terrible day. The jerk tourists have now started coming to the Assembly. It is too much for a man to take. I'm stepping down. Let Tootahooli have the honor — it ain't worth it. Auwe!"

Tonight we went to dinner at Dick Frost's house and Phil Stebbins was there, an American who has lived here for years and who has important property interests on the island. Mr. Stebbins spoke of the French *fonctionnaires* with considerable asperity. He said Tahiti is truly a Paradise for them, that a cop who is the equivalent of a motorcycle patrolman back home makes about six hundred dollars a month, gets a paid vacation in France, and very likely takes in as much as his salary in bribes and extortion. It is the custom of *fonctionnaires*, he said, to go into the Chinese stores and order a big

supply of merchandise and then say, "Charge it. I am a *fonctionnaire*." And they never pay the bills. I said to Mr. Stebbins that people had been telling me the French were not at fault, that the Tahitian Assembly was responsible for all the trouble. "The Assembly," he said, "is nothing but a front. The Governor is a king, an emperor, Almighty God. He can put you in jail for a year with no trial, no habeas corpus. He can veto anything the legislature does. The legislature is composed of thugs and swindlers, bribe-takers, men who jump and whine when the Governor speaks. The dirty god damned *fonctionnaires* have now arranged to give all the school children an extra day off. The extra day is Saturday and the only reason they've done it is they want to spend their weekends at their country places, and they want their children to be with them." Mr. Stebbins never let up in his philippic. His description of conditions on the island made the Reign of Terror sound like the Marriage of Loti. He says he stays in Tahiti out of habit and because he loves the natural beauty and the isolation. He cursed Americans who come out and throw their money around, spoiling the taxi drivers and fouling up the servant problem. He cursed the communists in government — meaning all those who believe in giving the working class a fair shake—and said that an ignorant native girl can invent the wildest fantasies and be believed in court against the word of an American employer. He said that the Chinese are worse than animals, that they still, on ceremonial occasions, eat baked dog — they have an agent who is on the prowl all the time, going from house to house, asking for unwanted dogs. Mr. Stebbins got off the subject of hateful people for a while and denounced coconut crabs, which have claws powerful enough to break open a coconut so they can get at the meat. He took us outdoors and pointed out the Southern Cross, which I wanted to see, and this led him back to the subject of people. He said that during the first few weeks of their stay here, people usually have stars in their eyes, and then they become disillusioned, and see all the rottenness around them, and they begin to gripe and plan their escape, but then the Tahitian disease takes hold and they are stuck — they will never leave the island this side of the grave. Mrs. Frost, a brunette beauty out of the Pacific Northwest, said that she is already in the third stage, that even if Dick is transferred she will not go with him, she is going to stay in Tahiti the rest of her life.

After a while another couple arrived, Mr. and Mrs. Hank Ketcham, he being the creator of the comic strip character Dennis the Menace. They are also Pacific Coast people but live now in Switzerland. Mr. Ketcham, a handsome guy with a good deal of off-the-cuff wit, was walking with a limp. He said he had an infected cut on his leg and later when it began to bother him I drove them back to the Hotel

Tahiti and arranged to pick them up tomorrow and bring them out to Maison Louise for drinks.

There was one depressing incident to mar the evening at the Frost house. Mrs. Frost said that she had played bridge with the Singletons, the people who are rehabilitating Emile Gauguin. I asked about Mr. Singleton's physical appearance and she said, "He's distinguished-looking. You know, like an important American businessman." That wasn't quite clear enough for me, so I said, "Does he look something like Warren G. Harding?" And Mrs. Frost replied: "Warren G. Harding? What did Warren G. Harding look like?" Mr. Stebbins and I groaned in unison. "I am going out and hang myself," said Mr. Stebbins. "So am I," I said, "after I take some nature's spelled backwards.

January 12

CALLED ON Bill Stone again this morning. These visits are among the more substantial pleasures of our life in Tahiti. We drive up the Broom Road a short distance and turn at the grocery store run by Louise's cousin and follow a bumpy road back to the blue lagoon. Then into the Stone compound and he is always sitting there at his desk in the wide-open office which faces the sea. Today he said that he doesn't mind a man exaggerating a little, but that Phil Stebbins exaggerates a thousand per cent in his attack on the malfunctioning *fonctionnaires*. Bill said that the French run things pretty well and wisely and have done many good things for the island. He made special mention of the laws which prevent unscrupulous operators from taking land away from the natives.

There is a constant flow of brown-skinned visitors at the Stone residence because Teuru is pure Polynesian from the island of Huahine. Bill said that these visitors have been urging him for years to let a native witch doctor cure his sick legs. Just recently, to keep them happy, he permitted the witch doctor to come in. The old man arrived and had a look at the legs and then said that he would have Bill up and around and playing soccer football within two weeks — this in spite of the fact that the patient has been on crutches or in a wheel chair for twenty-five years. The witch doctor brought in a dish of white sand which he rubbed on Bill's feet. 'It actually felt good,' said Bill, "because it was the same as if someone had sandpapered my feet — it toned them up for a few minutes." After several days of the sand, the witch doctor decided he was approaching the problem from the wrong direction. He said that Bill's sickness was a *popaa* sickness and needed a *popaa* cure. So now he brought a dish of strong, loud-smelling Tahitian rum and rubbed it into the feet and legs. "I had a strong barroom odor for a few days," said Bill. When the rum didn't effect a cure the witch doctor said he'd come back with an infallible remedy in a few days, but he never did. Bill said that there are quite a few of these old men and old women still practicing their black magic in Tahiti. They are forbidden to charge money but the law doesn't mention anything about baskets of eggs or strings of chickens.

The witch doctors and their native patients place great store in the activities of the *tupapaus*, the Tahitian ghosts. Even Agnes, the artist *vahine* of Carlos Palacios, has periodic bouts with the ghosts of Punaauia. She has traveled, lived a while in California, and is a cut above the average in intelligence, but she hears the *tupapaus* in the night. Carlos says that she is terrified by them and she leaps out of bed, yelling, "The Men of Death are outside!" She runs and gets a

broom and hurries outdoors and flogs the ground with it, yelling all the while as if Comanche Indians were bearing down upon her. Carlos says he is certain that his neighbors believe him to be a merciless wife-beater.

In former days Bill Stone was one of the mainstays of Quinn's bar and from time to time played saxophone in Eddie Lund's band there. He recalls how one particular booth, close to the entrance of the famous saloon, was known as Stone's Office. Most of the American colony gravitated to Quinn's in mid-afternoon, for it was usually cool there and the drinks were tall and had authority and the seats were comfortable and the company was excellent. In those days there was a Ping Pong table and Eddie Lund played soft piano music for the cocktail hour. Mrs. Marcelle Quinn, nee Gouptil, who owned the place, was one of the most beautiful ladies in Tahiti. She was a native girl and she married Quinn, who had been a waiter in San Francisco and came out to Tahiti and started in business with an ice cream parlor. They had two lovely daughters but they were divorced and Quinn went back to California. He raised one daughter and Marcelle raised the other. She continued operating Quinn's, which had become a drinking place, and married the establishment's trombone player, a man named Boozoo Frogier. I'm sure his first name is spelled differently but he is still manager of Quinn's and I like his name the way I have it. He runs the place and Marcelle works as an accountant at the bank. She is said to be a whiz at arithmetic. French arithmetic.

While Bill Stone was having a conference with someone from the hotel I picked up a magazine and found an article about the Tahitian style of dancing. In it Mme. Teroroheiarri Moua of Tahiti was quoted as saying that the island dancing "drew its inspiration from the worship of gods and kings, from the respect due to chiefs, and above all, from the love of beauty which, in Tahiti, pervades the bold mountains, the sweet-smelling valleys, the shimmering lagoons and the dazzling sky; from a child's smile, from a mother's tenderness, from the natural charm of woman and the proud strength of man, and lastly, from the *joie de vivre* of a people who are its soul!"

How beautifully put! What lovely phrases! What sheep-dip! The Tahitian style of dancing draws its inspiration from one thing and one thing alone — the procedures for getting people so sexually excited they'll fall to the ground and bite sticks.

Hank Ketcham has had our young French doctor look at his bad leg and is now confined to quarters. Two months ago on a dance floor in Geneva a whirling woman spiked him on the foot with her heel. Mr. Ketcham didn't know it but there is poison in a dancing woman's spur. The infection has spread up his leg and now he is full of penicillin.

Tonight we called on him and he and I sat around and talked cooking in the bedroom while our wives sat around and talked snorkeling in the living room. I told Mr. Ketcham about my specialty, the beef stew that made the *New York Times*. He rather surprised me by saying that he is best at mush. Fried mush. He said that his mother died when he was a boy and he was raised by a Pennsylvania Dutch woman and from her he learned to appreciate good fried mush, especially at breakfast time.

If I may leap from fried mush to sex, I would like to observe that the upside-down moral standards here in Tahiti cause some of the more respectable women to indulge in occasional feats of indecent exposure. Among the young American couples it is not unusual, during parties, for everyone to get plastered and then go swimming in the nude in the lagoon, or in the pool. If not nude, then at least stripped to the waist. I am reminded of this social custom because of an incident here at the Hotel Tahiti bar this afternoon. It was around three o'clock and half a dozen local men, who had been to some kind of a service club luncheon, were at the bar. Into the big room walked a handsome girl, half Tahitian and half French, known to them all as a thoroughly respectable person (in The Tahitian Way). One of the men saw her approaching and said something to her in Tahitian. She replied in the same language, then lifted the halter she was wearing, exposing one breast. He looked at it closely and then she put the halter back in place. Altogether, at the bar and at the tables, there were about fifteen people who saw this little performance. Nobody seems to know what the man said to her in Tahitian. Many would enjoy knowing.

My own interest in the matter is purely sociological. In the realm of sex I appear to be quite old-fashioned even though the discovery of new attitudes is exciting to me. Not long ago one of Jack Paar's associates spent an evening at my house and during our conversation he spoke of a certain prominent movie actor having been caught in a police raid on a Hollywood "Daisy Chain." My guest went on to relate how the actor's studio spent a fortune getting the affair hushed up because their man was starred in a big expensive production soon to be released. My wife and I were squirming with curiosity and finally I broke in and asked, "What's a Daisy Chain?" He was astonished that we were so ignorant of the things that are going on in the world around us, and he told us about Daisy Chains. The explanation gave me a feeling of being left out, of being a loner, of lacking togetherness. Later, in a letter to Mr. Paar's friend, I said that my wife and I were trying to locate a Daisy Chain in the wilds of upper Westchester County. We wanted one where our squeamishness, our beginning shyness, would be recognized and respected. "It is our

hope,” I wrote, “that they’ll let us be together in the chain at the start — just till we get used to it.” If you too are ignorant and don’t know what a Daisy Chain is, you’ll have to inquire around among your more sophisticated and degenerate friends — I can’t describe it in these pages. I must add, however, that since hearing of the institution, someone has told me of a Daisy Chain at the old Garden of Allah in Hollywood which was possibly the longest and most populous Daisy Chain in history, extending down to the swimming pool and in and out the doors of three bungalows. That, of course, was in the old days. These Hollywood young punks of today don’t know the meaning of the word glamour.

January 13

WE CALLED at the prison today with Aurora and talked with a screw at the front door, a man wearing khaki shorts and go-aheads. He said that Emile Gauguin was indisposed and unable to receive visitors, that he had been eating too much rich *popaa* food at the home of the people who are dragging him up from degradation. Tahiti's prison is not a country club, but it is a popular place among the natives and they have no objection to being sent there — the groceries are better than they get at home and they are permitted to make and sell such things as beaded belts and fish nets. It is not a large place and sits beside the water and looks more like a broken-down Florida motel than it does a jail. The crime of theft is said to be a rare thing in Tahiti, and stealing from tourists almost unknown, but recently a chambermaid was caught in the act at Lotus Village, where she took a couple of hundred francs out of a dresser drawer. She was taken into court and the judge was prepared to be severe with her; then a gendarme spoke up and said that the prison was full, no more rooms available. The judge told the chambermaid: "This is a very lucky thing for *you*." And he gave her a suspended sentence.

Aurora also took us to visit all four floors of the Grand Hotel on the waterfront. It is now little more than a flophouse, though externally it has the look of a solid structure. Its roof garden must have been a splendid place to dine on a moonlit night; today it looks as if it might have been inhabited by a flock of wild goats. The two floors that were used as M-G-M headquarters during the filming of *Mutiny on the Bounty* are now a shambles. This all seems a pity. The foundation is here for a good hotel but the people who own the building are not interested. Why? Someone said they have quite a bit of money and don't want to be bothered with any more. The big hotels of Tahiti today are constructed of bamboo and pandanus thatch and can't stand up very long under the steady assault of ants and rats and tourists and termites and mildew. Yet here on the waterfront, overlooking the colorful harbor and commanding a view of Moorea, is this substantial building — I believe it's made of concrete — that could be made into the best hotel property on the island. The same thing is true of the Hotel Stuart a couple of blocks away.

After ambling around the waterfront a while longer we drove out beyond our home and visited the tomb of Pomare V. This is a tall monument built of coral stones and resembling the body of an old-fashioned Dutch windmill. The tower is surmounted by a little roof of green corrugated iron and on top of that a metal funerary urn. I have been interested in this urn for a long time. It is a symbol of a major

fault that exists in the writing trade. A long time ago an unidentified travel writer visited this tomb and looked at the urn on top of it. He knew that Pomare V was a drunk, and now he noticed that the urn had the general shape of a Benedictine bottle. He didn't ask anybody, he just wrote it in his book or in his magazine article, flatly and without question — the Tahitian King drank Benedictine in such quantities that he died and so they put a Benedictine bottle on top of his tomb. Along came other travel writers, and in their research they dug out the first liar's work, and they accepted his story without question, and now it is a rare thing to encounter a book or an article about Tahiti without the Benedictine bottle being given prominent mention. The only recent writer who, to my knowledge, refused to accept the bottle story was Sydney Clark, but then Old Sydney is pretty reliable about most things. James Ramsey Ullman, a novelist of considerable talent, writes that the ornament atop the tomb is "a king-sized replica of a Benedictine bottle, lovingly carved in coral stone." If Mr. Ullman and the others had given a moment's thought to the matter, they would surely have seen that the invented story makes no sense at all. Would it be likely that the surviving family of the king would choose a liquor bottle as a decoration for his tomb? They were not ignorant savages, those later Pomares. And there remains the basic question of the Benedictine itself. It is unlikely that any man ever drank himself to death with Benedictine, unless he was an alcoholic cast ashore on a desert island with a thousand cases of the stuff and nothing else. This King Pomare, in fact, fed himself on another alcoholic beverage which, in my opinion, would sicken a man quicker than a cup of curare. An old chief of Mataiea, who knew Pomare well and sometimes drank with him, said the king had a large punchbowl and into this he would pour champagne, absinthe, claret, whiskey, beer and then add a few dashes and driblets of other strong waters. He would drink this mixture by the hour and it helped settle his nerves.

Paul Gauguin accompanied Pomare's funeral procession out the Broom Road and described the ceremony and the crowd and the tomb in his writings. He made no mention of any liquor bottle. Yet these modern writers accept the untruth without question. If that thing on top of the tomb had actually been a liquor bottle, it would have been as much of a sensation as a big clam mounted on top of a monument to Calvin Coolidge, or an ice cream cone atop a monument to Dolly Madison.

It is a pleasant spot where the tomb stands, occupying a neck of wooded land beside Matavai Bay, with a cool wind blowing in from that historic anchorage, and we spent a couple of hours lounging around and enjoying the place and reflecting on the unreliability of

travel writers. We talked also about fire-walkers, who still practice their mystifying art throughout Polynesia. Aurora said she has investigated the phenomenon of fire-walking and has an explanation of why the natives can stride barefooted across stones that have been brought to white heat. She said it is the degree of heat that is the key to the mystery. When the stones arrive at their maximal hotness, then they are not hot at all — they are so hot that they are not hot — and people can walk on them. If the stones are permitted to cool off, then anyone who walks on them will be burned. Aurora said it is all a matter of physics. I do not understand physics and sometimes I'm glad of it. I think I prefer another explanation, the one put forward by Willard Price. He says that the natives who do the firewalking have thick and calloused skin on the soles of their feet, the same as if they were wearing shoes, and that they sometimes stamp around on the wet beach before doing their fire-walking, so that the leathery skin becomes saturated with moisture.

The Navy Ball was held tonight on the pavement between the red marine building and the warship *La Capricieuse*. This is one of the premier social events of the year in Tahiti. A large area was fenced off with the usual palm fronds and banana leaves. In the center stood the bandstand, sporting a neon anchor in red and blue lights. There was space for dancing, of course, and an acre or two of tables. The affair is an annual benefit for the Navy, possibly to raise funds for rust-remover. There were many French naval officers present, all wearing whites, and the whites of the French Navy do not look neat — the uniforms have the appearance of being too big for the wearers, possibly because they are overstarched. Starch is a product that is used lavishly on this island. Austin Peterson has warned tourists not to specify starch for their shirts at Tahitian laundries — otherwise they will come back stiffer than surfboards.

The tinkling of ice in the glasses was growing louder inside the arena and the band from Quinn's was whanging away and the warship, looming as a backdrop to the festive proceedings, was draped with ribbons and strings of colored lights as if it were preparing to sail through the Floating Gardens of Xochimilco. (I want to make it clear that I am not going out of my way to poke fun at the French or the French Navy; during all of my adult life I have had the perverse facility of seeing how absurd and how ridiculous the human animal can appear when he is trying to achieve dignity through pomp and ceremony. Obviously great hordes and whole populations disagree with me, else coronations and state dinners and the blowing of taps and baptisms and all parades would be abandoned altogether.)

Nelle and I stood back of the barrier and watched the swells

arriving — top people from the Army and the Navy and the various government bureaus with their wives or mistresses, all richly caparisoned. And then, straggling along the street from the direction of Quinn's and the other grogeries, the common sailors and the merchant seamen and the public riffraff, all with their *vahines*, all wearing floral crowns and quite a few already plastered. As the vanguard of sailors and wharf rats approached I looked for action from the gendarmes, who were all around us, but they merely glanced at the rabble without changing the wooden expressions they are required to wear during working hours. The sailors and their girls arrived at the gate and bought their tickets. Some were carrying quart bottles of Hinano and they drank heartily before passing inside to join the big crowd. They were accorded just as much courtesy as the swells, for that is the way things are on this wonderful island. You go out to the best restaurants and dining rooms and your maid may be eating at the next table and you may, even if you are the Governor, find yourself dancing with your cook. Nobody seems to mind.

January 14

THERE ARE social gradations in Tahiti and these can often be determined by the kind of transportation a person uses. The upper classes drive automobiles, of course, but breakdowns are frequent and the best people will climb on a motor bike if their car is out of commission. Louise Chauvel might be considered a society figure but several times, unable to get her car started in the morning, we have seen her pedal off for work on a bicycle. The bee-sick-lette is the foot-propelled bike and ordinarily is used by the very old or the indigent. Then comes the Velosolex which has a small motor operating against the front wheel of an ordinary bicycle. After that, the Mobilette in two models, one being geared for climbing hills. The Vicky also climbs hills and is said to be the most numerous of all. And then there are the aristocrats — the Vespa and the Lambretta. Some of these machines are really handsome and their owners keep them clean and shining.

Thus far, driving my Dauphine, I have not hit a cyclist, but I rate this fact as an authentic miracle. Casualties are frequent on the streets of Papeete. A Tahitian who has taken a spill is sloshed all over with mercurochrome, a commodity that is shipped in by the tanker-load. This sort of therapy can make a man who has merely skinned himself up a bit look like a walking basket case. The French mercurochrome appears to be a brighter and ghastlier color than the kind we use at home, and it is unnerving to come face to face with a person who has almost been drowned in the stuff — he looks as if he were bleeding to death, all over. At the present moment our Miri has bright red legs and an assortment of bandages and adhesive patches; and Aurora herself took a header downtown this week and is patched up in a more conservative style. She and Miri met in the driveway yesterday and compared abrasions and Aurora said, indignantly, that a stupid Dauphine turned in front of her without signaling, and Miri bobbed her head furiously and cried out, "Same with me!" All cyclists who get into accidents with automobiles say the stupid automobiles turned in front of them without a signal.

I drive occasionally in the coagulated streets of New York City but out here, by comparison, the Art of Motoring is sheer madness. Every time I pass a Tahitian cemetery I nod deferentially in its direction — I feel so *close* to it. And though I am still so pleased with my Dauphine that I talk of buying one for myself when I get home (if I ever get home) there is one unpleasant thing about its size. Sometimes it will not stay put in its parking place. It is so small that a man can take hold of it and drag it around. This happens now and then at the Hotel Tahiti or even along the waterfront after I have moved it into a choice

parking spot. When I come back my car is gone and another is in its place. Someone has released my brake and dragged my Dauphine away by hand and then moved his own car in. It is a nuisance but I don't get sore about it except when my car has been replaced by one of those Citroen jobs that looks like a big ugly bullfrog.

In the beginning it was my custom to take the keys out of my car but later I learned that auto theft is almost unknown on the island. The reason: where can you take it after you steal it? Now and then a sailor will get drunk and drive away with a car, but he rarely goes very far and soon abandons it. Bicycles and motor bikes are stolen and this is a serious offense, for these things are not looked upon as toys or sporting goods in Tahiti. There is a book full of regulations concerning the operation of bikes, including one that says the owner's name must be fastened to the machine.

In a community where bikes are so numerous, the styles of riding are often startling to the eye of a New Yorker. There is the business, for example, of eating watermelon while riding through heavy traffic. We see it all the time because watermelon is a major crop here and the melons are as good as the best we have in the States. Small slices are sold at stands all around the town and these slices are often eaten by Tahitians in the saddle. Or bicycles. It is, to me, quite an achievement. I am an old watermelon eater and I have always found that the procedure requires a person's undivided attention, largely because of the seeds. But in America we have become prissy and over-civilized and we remove the seeds from the melon with a fork. The Tahitian bike rider doesn't worry about the seeds until they are in his mouth, and then he squirts them onto the roadway. It is considered polite to turn the head slightly and squirt them off to the side, rather than straight over the handlebars.

Another practice I have noted in the bike community is that of leading an unmounted steed. It is a common sight to see a Tahitian riding on one bike and leading another bike alongside. Sometimes a boy on the jump seat will be leading an empty bike, which ought to be fairly easy, but the lad who has to manage his own machine and keep the empty going in a straight line has a real job on his hands. Now and then we have seen empty bikes being led by people sitting in automobiles and I have been hoping for the sight of an empty under escort of a man on horseback, but thus far no luck.

Tahitians develop great affection for their bikes and pamper them like poodle dogs and give them pet names. For many years a man named Bunkley was one of Papeete's most important merchants. His son Francis has told me about the old man's bicycle. It was an ordinary, foot-propelled bike but the old man kept it in good condition and always spoke of it with respect and affection and once

thought of including it in his will. Merchant Bunkley grew older, and when he arrived in his eighties, he found that he was having difficulty keeping himself and his bike in an upright position. After several bad falls, he gave up riding it. He had to walk. But he retained his affection for the old bike, and took it with him wherever he went, wheeling it alongside. "There was a lot of sentiment involved," his son told me, "but he was also being practical. He had grown old and feeble and that bicycle served him as a support — sort of a crutch on wheels."

As in some other countries where the bicycle traffic is heavy, the law here forbids the blowing of auto horns except in real emergency. When The Congressman was here a gendarme caught him sounding his horn near the cathedral and took him into court. The magistrate gave him a severe look and remarked that The Congressman ought to know better than to toot his horn at a bike rider.

"But," said The Congressman, "I was not tooting at a bike rider. I was tooting to attract the attention of a friend on the sidewalk."

"Oh, I see," said the magistrate. "In that case, I dismiss the charge. It is all right to toot at a friend."

Recently I asked Aurora to tell me which are the rush hours in Papeete traffic.

"The first," she said, "is from seven to nine in the morning. Then from eleven to two. And from five to nine at night. These are the hours when the traffic is unbearable. But the worst of all is when a cruise ship is here, and then it is from eleven at night to three in the morning."

January 15

THERE ARE three or four buildings on Bengt Danielsson's property, in line with the Tahitian custom of having one house to sleep in, one to eat in, one to cook in and one to work in. Today, while visiting Bengt, I learned something of the history of the property.

From about 1936 until World War II it belonged to an American concert pianist who somehow lost a finger off his left hand and collected such a chunk of insurance money that he was able to retire and live in comfort in the tropics. At last report he was enjoying life under the warm sun of Mexico, living off the income from a fund which he refers to as “my finger money.”

After him came Clint Gregory. I have pieced together the Gregory story from Bengt and from Dave Cave, as well as from a few other people who knew the old man. Clint Gregory had been a locomotive engineer and lived in a little Ohio town and in the 1920s he got involved in a land swindle which brought him a profit of something over \$100,000. He was indicted and brought to trial but a smart local lawyer got him acquitted. The lawyer then said to Clint Gregory: “Now that I’ve saved you from prison, I want you to get your things together and take your money and clear out — get clean out of the United States.” So Clint Gregory embarked on a round-the-world tour. In the course of his travels he came to Tahiti and he liked what he saw. He began coming back for frequent visits. He was by now an old man and he liked the girl situation. So he bought the concert pianist’s property in the district of Paea and moved into its two-room cottage with a young and warm *vahine*. By the end of the war he was tottering and half blind but he refused to sit still. He had plenty of money so he went to San Francisco and began buying machinery. Those people in Tahiti who knew him had a feeling that the old man’s wealth was inexhaustible. There were rumors that he had important financial investments in the States and that the same lawyer took care of all his affairs back there.

In 1948 the big crates began arriving in Tahiti. They contained lathes of various shapes and sizes, and air compressors, and big power saws, and generators — all kinds of machinery. Dave Cave now became a friend of the old man, for Dave knows a lot about machines. Once Dave asked Clint Gregory what he intended to do with all that heavy machinery. “Oh, I don’t know,” said the old man, “I just enjoy openin’ up the crates to see what’s inside.”

He had a big diesel generator hooked up, and a smaller gasoline generator running alongside it, producing enough power to light a

whole village. Again Dave Cave asked him why. "They's always the chance," said Old Man Gregory, "that one a them generators will conk out, and then where would I be?" He had several of the compressor tanks installed near his house. He never owned an automobile because of his bad eyesight and he didn't need that compressed air to inflate tires, so Dave asked him what the compressors were for. "Well, Dave," he said, "I got no vacuum to tidy up my house, so when she needs a good cleanin', I just turn the air hose in there and blow ever god damn specka dust clean into the ocean. I have to tie the furniture down, but by god I git 'er clean!"

He had to build sheds to house his machinery and one of these was a sort of Iroquois long-house, a substantial structure with pandanus thatch which is now Bengt's office and library. By this time Clint Gregory's *vahine* had turned evil and with the aid of her friends was stealing him blind, or blinder, and he became sick and went into the Papeete hospital. Nobody was looking after him and so the French authorities stepped in. They got in touch with the old man's Ohio town. The lawyer was dead but his three sons were running his business and handling the affairs of Clint Gregory. One son came down to Tahiti and talked the old man into going to California for treatment. He died soon after his arrival there. His will left everything to the lawyer who had saved him from prison, so now the estate went to the sons. Eventually the word drifted back to Tahiti that the old man had owned office buildings and hotels in various American cities and was actually a very wealthy person. Dave Cave was given the job of selling the house and land and getting rid of the machinery. Dave set a price on the property and along came Bengt Dave took him out and showed him the place and Bengt said, "Exactly what I want." And so the deal was made. And Dave Cave still has some of old Clint Gregory's machinery stashed around his garage on Rue des Remparts.

Bengt Danielsson's first name is pronounced as in a Delancey Street description of a cross-shot in the game of pool: "He bengt the three-ball in the side pocket." On account of Aurora's respect for his erudition and our own growing admiration a common expression around our house, when a question of any kind arises, is: "We will ask Bennnnggg-tuh." And whenever we ask Bennnnggg-tuh we always get an adequate answer. Recently I asked him if he knew the type of architecture of the old American consulate; in thirty seconds he handed me a photograph of the building. I asked him something about Edgar Leeteg and he went to a cabinet and got a magazine, a scholarly periodical published in French, flipped quickly to the exact page and then began translating a long article about the black velvet painter.

For a man whose career has been that of sociologist, ethnologist and anthropologist, Bengt displays little in the way of academic

posture. He seems to bubble with high spirits, with a great zest for the pleasures of living and laughter and he is quick to discern the comical aspect of most human endeavor. His first field trip away from Sweden was to South America, where he accompanied a Finnish anthropologist into the Jibaro Indian country. These are the Indians known throughout the world as headhunters. "But," says Bengt, "they are not headhunters at all. If they kill an enemy, they shrink his head for a trophy. This is a perfectly nice and proper thing to do, according to Jibaro standards. It is a far cry from going out and *hunting* heads."

After the Jibaro researches Bengt moved on to the city of Lima and it was here in Peru that he met Thor Heyerdahl and his fellow Norwegians who were building a balsa-wood raft called the *Kon-Tiki*. Bengt and the Norwegians became good friends, though the Swede had no thought of going on the *Kon-Tiki* expedition. "Then," he recalls, "one of the men disappeared — he fell in love or was run over by a car or some similar foolishness. So I took his place."

"It must have been a real rugged experience," I said.

"Not at all," said Bengt. "It was a pleasant three-month vacation at sea."

Heyerdahl, in his book about the expedition, told about how it took four seamen to carry the box of Bengt's personal belongings on board the raft at Lima. The box contained nothing but books, most of them on ethnological subjects. And Heyerdahl has described how Bengt, during the long voyage of the *Kon-Tiki*, lay on his back reading Goethe, his toes hooked into the bamboo latticework of the cabin roof.

After the raft was wrecked, Bengt spent three months in Papeete. The town had not recovered from its wartime isolation and was somnolent in the sun, a true backwater of civilization. He loved it and decided he wanted to live here, and so he married a French girl named Marie-Therese, whom he had met in Lima, and as has been seen, bought the Clint Gregory property in Paea. Marie-Therese is a dark-skinned brunette who looks more Polynesian than French. The Danielssons once had a maid who was almost pure Tahitian, yet she was yellow-haired and fair-skinned. Visitors often addressed the maid as Mrs. Danielsson and mistook Marie-Therese for the hired help. She has been with Bengt on various field trips to the Tuamotus and the Marquesas, and they spent a year roving around Australia in a trailer. As of this moment Bengt has published eleven books and they are widely popular in the Scandinavian countries.

A few days back I ran into him on the street in Papeete. There was something I wanted to ask Benngggg-tuh. Had he ever heard of a place called Cat Island, somewhere in the vicinity of Tahiti? Of course he had. We stepped into a cafe and ordered some Hinano and he told me about it.

Eight or ten years ago an article appeared in a well-known American magazine telling of a small island near Tahiti inhabited solely by cats — thousands and thousands of cats, all so wild and savage that no human being dared attempt a landing for fear they would come down on him in screeching battalions and chew him to ribbons. The government of French Polynesia was disturbed by this situation, fearing that some unlucky seafaring people might be wrecked and washed ashore on Cat Island and there meet a horrible fate. So, the magazine article went on, the French Government at Tahiti had decided to give the island to any person who could get rid of the cats.

Within a few weeks after the article appeared the letters and the cablegrams were piling in. People in every section of the United States wanted to come to the South Pacific and tackle those cats. Each one told about how he would undertake the job. Some would bring poison, some would bring dogs, some would bring tigers. At first the French officials were amused, but then the thing began to get out of hand. It became apparent that a lot of Americans were already packing for the trip into the South Seas. And one large and fearsome expedition was being organized — a schooner had been chartered and was being loaded with traps and nets of various kinds, dynamite bombs, stink bombs, crossbows, shotguns, cat-proof armor, and so on. The French authorities had to announce that no such island existed.

The author of this article, said Bengt, was a woman who had passed through Tahiti and who had heard of Tetiaroa atoll, about twenty-five miles north of Tahiti, once owned by an English dentist who was also the British consul in Papeete. When he first acquired this island, the dentist-consul found it infested with rats, so he put several cats ashore to get rid of them. The cats began to multiply and became in turn a problem, so the owner got rid of them. That was all. This woman writer, Bengt said, made the rest of it up.

I have heard of several other incidents of this kind, in which the writers have used the South Pacific as the setting for fantastic and untrue stories. These stories have been passed off as truth and published by American magazines and the writers have been able to get away with the fraud because, until recently, the South Pacific was too far away for the facts to be checked. Now it is not so easy for the phonies of the writing trade — an air mail letter from the States can be delivered in Tahiti within two or three days.

January 16

THE MARIPOSA came in this morning and we were at the dock to greet all our friends of the staff and crew. Mixed in with the swarm of passengers preparing to go ashore we saw several of our local acquaintances, men and women engaged in the tourist business here in Tahiti. They represent the hotels and the travel agencies and the tour offices and we have known them socially in Papeete. But now they appeared in a different light — playing the role of professional greeter, dishing out hospitality in great luscious gobs. Here on the *Mariposa* their profession demands that they put on the happy smile and administer the French embrace and decorate the newcomers with leis and *couronnes*. It depressed me to realize that these friends have to indulge in this demeaning sort of work month after month, unendingly, hurrying from airport to dock and back to airport again. They flash their teeth in glowing smiles, they radiate good will and warmth to utter strangers who, most likely, are as dull as fence posts. I felt truly sorry for them until, later on, I spoke to a couple of them about their horrible work. They told me they love it, and that their jobs are better than most other jobs, for the reason that they get to meet all these new and interesting people on familiar and intimate terms.

In the crush of people at the head of the gangway Nelle pointed out a local girl, a beautiful French blonde. She and her husband, also French, own one of the leading beauty salons in Papeete. They came here a year ago from Nice and they have a thriving business but they are selling out and going to settle in Honolulu. The reason: they cannot take the moral code of Tahiti. In a recent conversation with Nelle this girl said: “Tahiti is no place for a young married couple who really love each other. At first we didn’t think it would bother us. We felt certain that we could ignore all the cheating and two-timing among the other married couples. But it is poisonous. You can’t escape it. You have to decide you’ll live under the Tahitian code, or you move away. We know another French couple, our age, who live here and who were once our closest friends. They were deeply in love with each other. But within a few months of their arrival here, the girl was sneaking off with a Tahitian man. The husband found out about it, of course — everybody knows these things — and he took on a Tahitian girl. Now what has happened? They are living apart, our friends, who were so happy before. My husband and I love each other and we are not going to let this thing happen to us. We are getting out.”

I have been reading a thick, weatherbeaten book called *Ancient Tahiti*, written by Teuira Henry and published by the Bishop Museum

in Hawaii. Teuira Henry was a schoolteacher whose grandfather was a leading Protestant missionary for many years in Tahiti. He accumulated mountains of notes concerning the history of the island but he died before he could assemble them into a book, and so his granddaughter did the job. Some writers think it is the most important book ever produced on the subject of Tahiti. I must dissent from this opinion. Here is a book purporting to be a true picture of Tahiti and its people and there is almost no mention of sex in its pages. People tell me I should keep in mind that the book was written for and published by the Bishop Museum, which has a strong missionary background. It remains ridiculous—a history of Tahiti in which sex is ignored. As well produce a definitive history of Detroit with no mention of the automobile. As well describe the Sahara Desert without mentioning sand. Still, I must admit that the book contains a lot of information on other subjects. Coconuts, for example. I am still interested in coconuts as lethal objects and Ralph Varady has told me that he heard, a year or so ago, that a workman had been killed by a falling coconut somewhere in our district. Teuira Henry gives us a sort of reverse view of this proposition, as follows:

In former times the fractured human skull was mended with coconut shell in the *nia* stage, when it was of the same thickness as the skull, by carefully removing the splinters of bone, smoothing the edge of the broken part, nicely fitting in the shell, and then closing it over with the skin of the scalp. The bone of the skull gradually knitted itself around the shell, which lasted through the remainder of the man's lifetime and did not inconvenience him. Skulls thus mended have been seen and the settings found satisfactory by scientists of note.

There are many other items of interest in the Henry book. The author tells us that in ancient times the people of Tahiti were accustomed to sit around and count. Some people could count all the way up to the *'iu* or one million, and for doing this they were widely admired. Alas, how we in America have neglected the ancient pleasures!

Another note reveals the antiquity of modern teen-age slang. In 1885 a Mr. Hartwell from California watched an exhibition of fire-walking on the island of Raiatea. He wrote a description of it and submitted it to a San Francisco newspaper. The editor rejected it in a letter saying: "You are crazy, man!"

The teen-agers of Tahiti today are just as crazy, man, as they are

back home. I have just had a letter from the Santa Barbara lady who was here with her teen-agers and who tried to help me with my ampule problem. She reports that her son became acquainted with a cute French-Tahitian girl while he was here. They swam together and danced, and the girl, Danielle, practiced her English, which she was studying in school. Back in Santa Barbara the boy received the following letter:

My Dear Bill

Just a little letter for give you our thoughts. I hope that you have did a good traveling. The night that you are started we are going on the mountain for seeing your start The day after Friday: Saturday. We are going with Sylvain, Loulou and me only, to bathe ourselves to the Hotel Tahiti. And when we go there we thing a great many to you, to Johnny, to Barbara and her small sister.

Loulou has asked me the address of Barbara for write her, he is loving of she, and when he speaks me of Barbara I cannot prevent me to laugh.

Dear Bill I shall send you a photograph of me, but no in this letter, because I am fearing that the letter does not happen at the address indicated by you. If it happens at you, you will write me for that I know the letter is happened. Like that, I should can to send you photographs, things of Tahiti, or discs.

Dear Bill if you send me discs: Here is my choice: discs of Elvis Presley, Ricky Nelson, Everly Brothers, Clift Richard and others very nice success American. These discs are my preferred and I like them and when I play them I shall think of you.

Your friend to loves you a great many

Danielle

Tonight we dressed up and put on hard shoes and had dinner on the *Mariposa*. Nelle says that her eye and mind are now so accustomed to the people of Tahiti that the scene in the ships dining room was almost a shock to her. The stiffish, formal clothes of the women, and the men wearing jackets and ties, and everyone in shoes and stockings — all this, and especially the white faces of most of the people, seems to belong to another world. We have become so used to dark skins that a white face looks almost cadaverous. We caught sight of Baldwin Bambridge and his *vahine* and Baldwin was forking down the *Mariposa*-style vegetables. And the Dick Frosts were present. They

said the periodic visits of the Matson ships are important to them. It means a chance for them to get a first-rate American steak dinner. This is the only occasion in Tahiti when Dick wears anything on his feet other than white sneakers. His feet are no longer able to tolerate hard shoes and the sneakers have become a sort of trademark for him. He puts on the hard shoes when he dines on the cruise ships, but he always brings his sneakers with him in the car and changes back so he'll be comfortable on the drive home.

January 17

WE DROVE again today to the home of Carlos Palacios and his Agnes to find out how Emile Gauguin is coming along with his painting. The report is that he has finished twelve pictures. "They all tend toward the same theme," said Carlos. I asked what the theme was. "It is uncertain," he said.

We talked of Emile's troubles with the law and Carlos said he usually steals things out of parked cars. But then there was The Case of the Naive Nurse. A year or so ago there was a buxom French nurse employed at the Papeete hospital. One evening she left her work and walked through the gloaming to the little house where she lived alone. This had been payday at the hospital and in her purse was four thousand francs in cash. As she made her way homeward a fat man followed her through the shadows. It was Emile Gauguin.

Arriving home the nurse put her things down in her little living room and went to take a shower. While she was thus engaged Emile slipped into the house. He quickly grabbed up the purse and removed the four thousand francs and put the money in his hip pocket — he was wearing his usual faded shorts, nothing else. He was standing there when the nurse walked into the room, as naked as a jaybird.

A torrent of ardent French phrases now poured from Emile's lips. The girl stood there, in a state of semi-shock, and listened. He told her that he had long admired her from afar, and now it was his desire to express his devotion in a more positive and concrete way. The nurse knew who he was. She told him that he was a bum and she wanted nothing to do with him. He pleaded with her passionately but she withstood his eloquence and told him to begone. Then he cried out, "But I will pay you much money!" She threw back her head and laughed scornfully. "You are Emile Gauguin," she said. "You do not know what money is. You have never had any money and you never will have any." But now Emile surprised her. He pulled a large sheaf of bills from his pocket. "You are mistaken, my chick," he said. He was now quite aroused. "Here," he said, "I will give you all of this — four thousand francs — if you will take me to your bed." Now the nurse showed a momentary flash of indignation, but her eyes were on the roll of francs, and the sin of greed took possession of her, and she concluded that there were worse human creatures in the world than Emile, and she said, well, all right, hand me the money, and away they went to her couch.

Ten minutes after Emile crept away from her little house she discovered the swindle. She set up a great howl, and ran all the way to the police station, and told them to go arrest Emile for stealing her

money. "But you have your money," said the police. "Yes," she said, "but he stole it from me and then spent it on something."

In court the nurse, with what some thought to be a considerable lack of common sense, told the story exactly as it had happened. The judge peered at her from beneath his white wig. When the time came for him to speak, he was as Solomon. He said that there appeared to be little in the way of wisdom on either side of the matter, and especially on the side of the unhappy nurse. He said to her, "In my judgment you have not lost much, if anything." And he refused to send Emile Gauguin to jail.

Around town, at Bar Vaima and elsewhere, it was said that the nurse had indeed been stupid but that the real fool, as usual, was Emile. He was a fool, they said, because he could have offered the nurse *two* thousand francs and gotten what he wanted.

Each day that Emile is hauled out to Punaauia for his painting lessons he passes the spot where Paul Gauguin once lived — a site now marked by a wooden sign. Emile probably has no knowledge of it but his father was pretty much of a bum during the years he spent in Tahiti. The whole Gauguin story is laced with fine irony. Paul Gauguin once wrote a letter from Tahiti, telling a friend that he was starving to death; years afterward that letter sold for \$5600. In 1901 Paul Gauguin sold his hut and his little piece of land for five thousand francs. Twenty-five years later his painting of that same hut was sold for a small fortune in England.

There is an interesting sidelight to the Gauguin story, concerning the man who really brought world fame to the painter—Somerset Maugham. He came to Tahiti in 1916, at which time he was organizing his novel *The Moon and Sixpence*, a fictionalized account of Gauguin's life. At that time the name of Gauguin was little known outside the art circles of Montparnasse. When the Maugham novel was published in 1919 it was not advertised or identified as the true story of Gauguin and the critics did not know of the connection. They wrote that Maugham had "willfully handicapped himself with improbabilities." They said the plot was fantastic and the main character impossible of belief.

From all I have read Paul Gauguin was not a likable person. I sometimes wonder why so many accomplished men have to be such miserable bastards. Thomas Craven says that Gauguin's famous book about his life in the South Seas, *Noa-Noa*, is quite fraudulent. It was written to impress the people Gauguin had left behind in Paris and was not a true picture of the degraded and unhappy life the artist actually led in Tahiti.

This much I can say for Emile — he is a likable person, he doesn't have spells of melancholy, he doesn't go in for the black brooding that

characterized his father. He doesn't get sick, except when he eats food that is too rich for him, and I doubt that he ever goes hungry. He may not have good sense but he gives every indication of being happy and contented. And there is one further observation I must make. He is actually an impressive-looking man. If I took him and dressed him up in a well-tailored business suit, and put a white shirt on him and a conservative necktie, he would be the very personification of one of the great characters of our time: the Chairman of the Board. Stomach and all.

And as for his celebrated father, let us turn again to Thomas Craven, who wrote in his 1934 book *Modern Art*:

For a true account of Gauguin's experiences in Tahiti we must consult his letters. In these the heroic mask of savagery is discarded, and the half-breed malcontent stands before us in all his barefaced ugliness: Gauguin of the enlarged ego, coarse, candid, witty and cruel, but sharp of eye and very gifted. He went to the island as one, sick of civilization, "turns to live with animals" in a state of continuous placidity. And what did he actually find there? A handsome people with the grace and elasticity of wild animals, the men effeminate, the women large, sculpturally formed and virile. He found disease grafted on indolence, and indolence steeped in sin. A race famed for light-heartedness was now only frivolous, behind every traditional courtesy lurked a subtle deceit; and the old spirit of generosity had given place to cruelty and wanton disregard of property rights. The noses of children were broken, and their bodies steamed and fattened to enhance their sensual charms; wives were systematically exchanged; and the women suckled puppy dogs in preference to their own offspring. None of these customs offended his sensibilities, and some appealed to him strongly. His main grievance was against the European evils which had contaminated the promised land.

So that's the way it was in Tahiti at about the time the first Ferris wheel was being put together back in Chicago in the glorious era of Grover Cleveland.

January 18

THERE OCCURRED today, at Bar Vaima, a meeting which probably will be remembered as long as seafaring men get together and spin their yarns anywhere in the world. Before I describe this meeting, I must explain that from the time of our arrival in Tahiti I have been itching to organize some kind of Great Sea Adventure. Something to compare with the voyage of the *Bounty*, or the *Kon-Tiki* expedition, or Magellan's trip. It hardly makes sense for a man to spend this much time in the South Seas without going off on a voyage fraught with hazard and hardship.

When I first saw the *Wanderer* tied up across the street from the Hotel Stuart I knew that was the vessel I wanted for the big adventure. Not only because of her graceful lines, and the fact that she has some sails, but because of her history. As I have noted earlier, this is the vessel that once belonged to Sterling Hayden, the movie actor, aboard which he fled the United States with his children, in some kind of a legal fight with a former wife. As I remember it Mr. Hayden was defying the United States Government and everybody else on earth, and this gave the flight to Tahiti a certain aura of romance and intrigue, and the *Wanderer* was much in the headlines.

So I approached the vessel's present owner, Captain Omer Darr, and he said that he was willing to take me and a party of adventurers anywhere on earth. We started discussing distant ports and I began to quail at the prices and to think in terms of islands closer to Tahiti. Then I laid it on the line. How much would it cost me to charter the *Wanderer* for a one-day voyage to Moorea — over in the morning, back in the afternoon? Captain Darr said he didn't think he could do it because of international law. We communicated with Bill Stone for legal advice, and Mr. Stone said the regulations forbid an American skipper from charging anybody for passage between one French port and another French port. I suggested that Captain Darr be a man and defy the god damn international law, but he said he couldn't afford to do it. I said that the regulation was a stupid one and the whole body of international law was put together by jerks.

Prospects for the great adventure remained uncertain for a long while and then last night I began telling Hank Ketcham about it. He said that he had always wanted to take part in such a voyage, to swash a few buckles, and that perhaps we could join forces in the project because he already had a boat. He and Jo Anne had arranged to go to Moorea tomorrow on a vessel which they would have all to themselves. I said that my planning had always included Ralph Varady as a member of my crew, for the reason that he is big and

strong and, also, his name is closely associated with the island of Moorea. Fine, said Mr. Ketcham — Varady could go with us. I suggested that we all meet today at Bar Vaima and work out the details; And so it came to pass that late this afternoon the five of us settled down at a table and began making our plans.

"First," I said, "what is the name of our ship?"

"The *Fiesta*," said Mr. Ketcham.

"Oh my God!" said Ralph, passing a hand across his forehead.

"Seems like a poor name for a ship operating in South Pacific waters," I suggested. "Belongs in Mexico."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Ketcham. "It could be left over from the great days of Spanish sail."

"Sail!" exclaimed Ralph. "I think I'll resign. You people better buy a ton and a half of Dramamine."

"Where is this ship?" I asked.

"Yonder," said Mr. Ketcham with a wave of the hand. It was almost directly across the street from us. We all walked over and looked at her. I said that I was surprised the land crabs hadn't eaten her up while the owner wasn't looking. In truth, she was not of noble proportions, and I felt she had too much red paint on her hull. She represented a tremendous come-down from the *Wanderer* but I was determined on the voyage, so we went back to our table and along came Preston Moore, whose insurance office is two doors away from Bar Vaima and who is the Lloyds of Tahiti. Mr. Moore has been in the South Pacific for many years and knows both the land and the sea, so we asked him to join us for a drink. He listened to our plans for a while and then said the adventure would be meaningless and in violation of all romantic tradition unless we formed a press gang and impressed somebody. Mr. Ketcham asked Mr. Moore if *he* wanted to be impressed, or shanghaied aboard the *Fiesta*, and he said it was the last thing on earth he wanted. Then Mr. Ketcham exclaimed: "Arcaro!" We all knew that he meant Eddie Arcaro. Mr. Arcaro and his wife have been at the Hotel Tahiti for several days and have become friends of all of us. It would indeed be fun to impress them. I asked Preston Moore, just to be sure, how we should go about it. "You form a press gang," he said, "and you stun him, and drag him on board. When he comes to you will be at sea and he will be greatly mystified." Mr. Moore said that under the rules of impressment we would be allowed to hit Mr. Arcaro once each, and Mr. Ketcham turned to me. "You hit him first," he said. "Hit him a good one before it's my turn. He's a wiry little bastard." The suspicion was beginning to cross my mind that this Ketcham is a devious character, and I resolved to keep my eye on him.

I now proposed that Mr. Moore insure our vessel and all its

occupants, whereupon he departed hurriedly on the pretext of having an early dinner date. His place was taken by Kevin Keating, a San Francisco newspaperman who works for Stanton Delaplane. At this moment Mr. Ketcham was advancing a hold proposal, that on our return from Moorea we convert our voyage into a military operation and capture the island of Tahiti, seizing it for America, planting the Stars and Stripes and throwing the French the hell and gone out.

Mr. Keating now said it would be much better if we forgot about the United States and set up an independent kingdom. "After you got your country established," he explained, "you could notify the United States that your regime is being threatened by communists, and so Washington would begin sending you foreign aid money, and you would be a lot better off than if you were *owned* by the United States." This seemed to make sense and so we agreed to it, *viva voce*. I was both pleased and flattered that, when I suggested that I be crowned King of Tahiti, there was very little opposition. Somebody proposed that Eddie Arcaro could be General of Short-Stirrup Cavalry and that Mr. Ketcham could be Secretary for Drawing Pictures.

We now discussed the matter of trading with the natives and I recommended that we take along a bucket of copra. Mr. Ketcham objected.

"I'm sure," he said, "that when we get there we will find that they have copra to throw away. If they have anything we want, we will trade our *vahines* for it."

"What *vahines*?" asked Ralph.

"These *vahines*," said Mr. Ketcham, gesturing toward Nelle and Jo Anne. "I think I might get a sack of vanilla beans for my *vahine*."

The *vahines* were making vulgar noises, but we ignored them.

"Do you want vanilla beans?" I asked of Mr. Ketcham. "Is that why you are going on this great adventure? To get some crummy vanilla beans?"

"Well," said Mr. Ketcham, "it's true I have little use for vanilla beans, but that's not the way to look at it — the view to take is that we will be getting rid of these *vahines*"

Mr. Ketcham said he felt that we should have a goodly supply of grog to prevent scurvy, and Ralph said grog doesn't prevent scurvy, and Mr. Ketcham said it prevents *his* scurvy. Ralph said that Hinano beer ought to be sufficient, and that we should have some scurvy grass, which is a plant that grows in the islands around here and if you eat it you won't get scurvy. Jo Anne wanted to know how it is prepared and Ralph said it is eaten raw, the way cows eat it. Nelle said she'd like to try marinating it in lime juice and serving it with coconut cream.

Now we voted on who should be in command of the expedition

and I won and there was dark muttering, and plotting against duly constituted authority, this being the work of a dissident faction consisting of the foul Ketcham, who wanted to be captain himself. He thought it unfair that I should be captain on the voyage and King of Tahiti later, but I convinced him that his talents made him a natural for the job of navigator. He mutinied three times before the meeting broke up. In one of his loyal periods he proposed that we all get our loins tattooed as was the custom among the ancient Tahitians. Ralph said there are no more tattoo artists left on the island, except maybe one old Chinese gentleman. All hands objected to having a Chinaman fooling around with their loins.

The final order of business was the appointment of the press gang, made up of Hank Ketcham and his wife Jo Anne, and they were instructed to seize and stun both Eddie Arcaro and his wife, Ruth, and have them at the vessel at the appointed hour for sailing — nine A. M... And so the Ketchams headed west, saying “Avast!” and we headed out east, crying “Man the scuppers!” and Ralph Varady stayed behind at Bar Vaima, staring at the floor.

January 19

GASTON, the roving barber, was due at seven this morning but he didn't come and this was a great disappointment to me; I hate to go off to sea without a haircut. We took a leisurely breakfast and then made our way to the rendezvous. Ralph Varady arrived on the dot of nine and Kevin Keating showed up to provide press coverage for our sailing. Mr. Papillon, owner of the *Fiesta*, was present. He said he wouldn't be able to go because he helps run Bar Vaima and would be busy all day. He took us across the street and introduced us to the permanent crew. The wheelman was almost as fat as Emile Gauguin and was named Tehameamea (Becoming-flushed-easy) while the deckhand was Mahu-Faturau (Fog-of-many-owners).

No Ketchams. No Arcaros.

"Listen," said Ralph, "I gave up my seat on the first jet flight to Bora Bora today to go on this nut trip. Why can't people be on time?"

It was around nine-twenty when the missing foursome hove in view. The delay was blamed on Ruth Arcaro, who had defied impressment until she had her eggs. Hank Ketcham said he had not stunned the Arcaros because they already looked stunned when they got up. I was pretty roiled and felt like lashing somebody to the foremast if we'd had one. The ship's stores were already on board so now we all climbed into the *Fiesta* and Mr. Papillon and Kevin Keating stood by to holler farewells. Mr. Keating had notebook and pencil in hand and Ralph said to him, "Tell them that I died with a smile on my lips." And I added, "And I with a final quip."

The *Batjan*, a big ungainly cargo vessel, lay near our berth, her hold full of Dutch copra. Several members of her crew were lolling on the deck of the freighter, paying no heed to our feverish and confused preparations. That's the way it is on the waterfronts of the world. Here we were, about to set sail o'er a heaving and perilous sea, and nobody cared. At the sidewalk tables across the street half a dozen deckhands were swigging beer at nine-thirty in the morning by the clock, engaged in loud and bantering talk. They didn't even give us a glance. I curled my lip in their direction and curled the other one at the *Batjan*.

Eddie Arcaro scrambled for one of the seats equipped with a cushion and whipped out a paperback copy of a Frank Yerby novel. He is a Frank Yerby fan and says that whenever he is reading Frank Yerby he loses himself completely, enters another world, and that's where he wanted to be right now because he is subject to seasickness and he has heard that the Pacific Ocean between Tahiti and Moorea is wavy.

As we chugged across the lagoon and through the pass I handed a map of Papeete and a map of Moorea to Mr. Ketcham and asked him to compose a chart and map a course and get a fix on the sun and he said aye aye sir. A short time later I found that he had made his first navigational error; he had been reckoning with the map of Papeete and thirty minutes after sailing he gave me our position as two blocks south of the Papeete post office, next door to the Chamber of Commerce.

I busied myself taking stock of the ship's stores. We had two packages of Clarets, one half can of Planters Peanuts, a few bottles of orange pop and two dozen bottles of Hinano beer. All shipshape. Mr. Ketcham insisted on calling the fat helmsman "the guider" and I corrected him and told him that if he persisted in his landlubber perversity I would throw him the hell in irons. If I could find any.

Mr. Arcaro rarely looked up from his book. He reads a book in almost exactly the same posture he employs in winning the Kentucky Derby. He sat in a sort of crouch, his knees held high as if both feet were in the irons, and he grasped the paperback novel as if it were the reins. I considered this posture to be so striking that I took a picture of him without his knowing it.

Mr. Ketcham spent some time in conversation with the helmsman and I assumed their conference had to do with navigation, but later he told me that he had been unable to communicate, because of the language barrier, and that, in truth, he, Mr. Ketcham, was trying to get his mind off the fact that he was growing seasick. We had all taken pills, except Ralph, but they were not working in Mr. Ketcham's case and in a little while he was sitting down staring at the deck. His color was not good. I went over and talked soothingly to him, for I am, like Bligh, the kind of a skipper who is always concerned with the welfare and health of his crew. He said I had better take over the navigation for a while, or give the job to someone else. I offered it to Mr. Arcaro but he said, "Go away." His wife, Ruth, said she would be happy to try her hand at navigating. A short time later we went through the pass in the Moorea reef and into the lagoon and began following the trail of the barber poles which stick up from the water and mark the course of the channel. "Just passed the five-eighths pole!" sang out Ruth Arcaro, and for once her husband looked up from his Yerby. I now notified Mr. Ketcham that we were inside the lagoon and his health improved rapidly. "I make no apology," he said. "In fact I am proud that I got seasick. In all the sea books I've ever read, the hero always gets seasick on the first day, and is in tiptop shape after that. Old Hornblower always does it."

We entered Papetoai Bay, considered by many to be one of the most beautiful scenic spots on earth. We boarded the main tack,

heaved and pawled a bit, took the gaskets off and sheeted home the small sail, of which we had none, and made our way carefully to the anchorage we were seeking. This was the shore where Ralph Varady spent a year, living the life of a South Sea hermit. He had been put ashore from *Te Vega* by Captain Darr, who owned eighteen acres of land at this spot. Captain Darr wanted Ralph to spend a year improving the property and Ralph accepted the challenge and out of it came his book *Many Lagoons*.

At the time I was reading that book, back home, I told myself that I would enjoy meeting its author if only because of one remarkable incident narrated in its pages. Ralph Varady once lynched himself, at this very spot we were visiting, in order to cure a backache. Earlier in his life he had dislocated a vertebra, and an osteopath had got it back in place. Now, in the South Pacific, far from any osteopath, he wrenched that vertebra out of line again. Here is how Ralph describes what happened:

I had observed the technique used by the osteopath in putting the vertebra back in place. There was nothing complicated about it. It was only a matter of stretching the spinal column, in straight line, in the hope that the offending bone would go back in place with all the others when the tension was released.

I conceived the idea of stretching myself by building a contraption which would have the same effect as an osteopath's stretching table. From wood I built a stock, something similar to that used in olden days when a man was put on a public square for a day with his head sticking through a hole in a board. In the vicinity of the house was a tree with a sturdy branch running horizontally out from the trunk at a height of ten feet. To this branch I fastened the stock in a horizontal position by means of a rope.

Then I waited for nightfall and, prior to retiring, I took a sleeping pill from my medicine cabinet. I went into a deep slumber, with my alarm clock set for one o'clock in the morning. At that time I awoke feeling relaxed, half numb and at first unwilling to get out of bed. I forced myself to get up and go to the stock. For a light, there was a hurricane lantern hanging on the same branch to which the stock was attached. With my body muscles in a relaxed and pliable state, I fixed the stock around my head in such a way that it held my head at two points only, at the back of the cranium and under the chin. Standing on an empty box, I rigged the stock at the required height above the

ground, seven feet, which meant that when I stepped off the box, my feet would be just one foot off the ground. Everything was ready, and I stepped off the box and was left dangling in mid-air. I kept myself as limp as possible in an upright position, and I hung like that for a full minute. Then I pulled the box back under my feet by means of a rope which I had tied to my waist. I returned to bed, took another sleeping pill and dozed off. Next morning I awoke cured, and to this day I have not been bothered by my back.

Well, I've been bothered with *mine*. Reading it again makes me ache all over. Please keep in mind that Ralph performed this cure while he was far out of shouting range of any other human being. I have often thought about him, hanging by the neck there in the night amongst the coconut trees. I thought about it when, as captain of this expedition, I was handing out assignments. I hope you have noted that I gave Ralph nothing to do.

Ralph and Eddie Arcaro and Jo Anne Ketcham put on swimming clothes and went over the side as we lay off the beach where Ralph's old thatched house stands. Eddie and Jo Anne had snorkeling equipment and began looking at things on the bottom of the bay. Ralph waded ashore and poked around the shacks of his former barony. I tried to spot the tree from which he had hanged himself, but all I could see were tall coconut palms. I stayed on board, as a good captain should, for we had developed engine trouble. Our vessel had two engines, one diesel and one gasoline, and neither was in good shape. Now one of them had ceased functioning and Tehameaamea and Mahu-Faturau were having trouble getting it started. Finally we limped away from the anchorage, leaving our three companions on or near the shore. I had always wanted to limp somewhere in a disabled vessel, preferably back to port, but now I began to grow uneasy. Here we were, out in this watery wilderness, miles from any settlement. Our stores were running low, mainly because of the peanut disaster. When we were about halfway along on our voyage, Mr. Ketcham had reached across the narrow deck to hand the can of peanuts to Ralph, and there had been a slip, and the peanuts were all spilled. I alone cried out against this backhand blow from Fate — I knew that our total food supply was represented by those peanuts. We couldn't subsist, at least not for long, on the Clorets. But the others poo-pooed my alarm and within a short while people had walked back and forth on the precious peanuts and they had been ground into goober dust.

Now we got out further into the bay and the two natives went to

work on the faulty engine, removing a hatch and doing a lot of crazy things with battery wires. I gazed off toward the far shore and thought, Dear Lord we may never see Ralph and Eddie and Jo Anne agayne. But just then the balky engine started with a roar, the hatch was replaced, and within a few minutes we had picked up our companions.

We moved back into the lagoon and headed for Cook's Bay and I heard Eddie Arcaro telling Mr. Ketcham that he had taken his two favorite saddles with him to Australia, and the authorities wouldn't let him bring them in until they had been fumigated, and Mr. Ketcham said to Mr. Arcaro, didn't that embarrass you a little, having your *saddles* fumigated, and Mr. Arcaro grinned and said hell no. And then I heard Mr. Ketcham say to Mr. Arcaro, "With all that riding you do, don't your legs have a tendency to wear out on the inside?" I didn't hear Mr. Arcaro's answer.

We cruised along the shore of Cook's Bay and passed within half a mile of Villa Velour, the home built by Edgar Leeteg, the place where he produced all his velvets. The little pastel buildings had a faded air about them and we could see a couple of women standing near the water's edge, looking at us — I have been told that Leeteg's widow now occupies the premises. I wanted to run in and land and have a close look at the place, but when Ralph told me that Leeteg's famous outhouse exists no more, I was so disappointed that I ordered full speed ahead. We shall have to be content with the description of the outhouse in *Rascals in Paradise* by Michener and Day. It follows:

He vowed that he would build the most expensive, luxurious and altogether resplendent privy in the Southern Hemisphere, and not since the days of the late Roman emperors has anyone enjoyed such a toilet. It was built like a low Polynesian temple, with thick masonry walls and massive buttresses. An enormous grill of metal was set into one side, across which swam twenty-six metal fish painted in seven different colors. The interior was imported Italian marble with a seating arrangement that would have satisfied Caligula. It was festooned with flowers and scented by the latest devices from Paris. From its commodious seats one could gaze on Paopao Bay and the softly swaying coconut palms. There were also books and magazines and fretwork to please the mind, and the edifice was painted in such subtle colors that once seen it could not ever be forgotten. The corrugated roof was painted a tile red, and was held up by a beige wall, which rested on a salmon-pink base riding on a

turquoise blue footing. And up the middle of the grille, holding the entire design together, rose a magnificent metal coral bush through which the dazzling fish intertwined. Bigger than an ordinary house, capacious enough to serve a platoon of men, it was Leeteg's noblest architectural creation and stands today to confound his enemies. They tried to prevent its building and claimed that it showed the crazy American had really gone mad, but Leeteg countered that a man ought to enjoy the kind of privy that suited his personality, and he won.

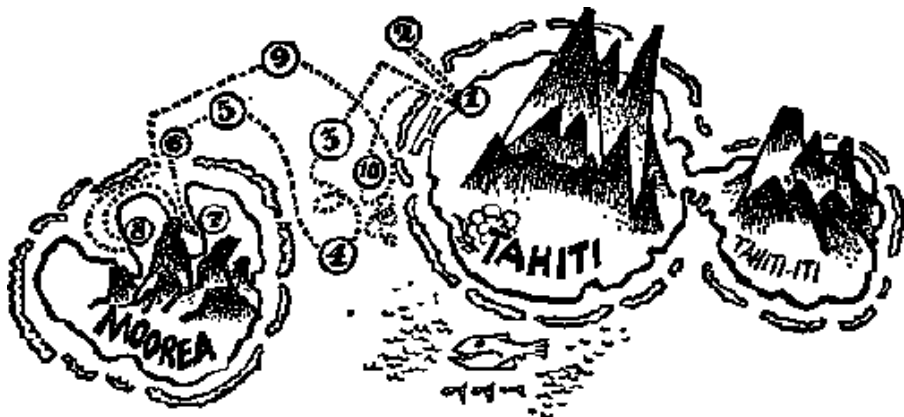
He won, and he lost, for the magnificent edifice has crumbled and fallen to ruin. Ah, how ephemeral the glorious works of man! How fleeting the life of his greatest monuments!

So we moved on beyond the Leeteg landfall and now we ran into southwest trades and, being unable to luff, chose to pit our strength against variable westerlies, all bad — demn my soul! At long last we tied up at a pier in Cook's Bay and had a hearty meal at an inn there, a place operated by Mme. Jeanne Winkelstroeter, who is head of Tahiti Tours. She and Mme. Jacquemin and two or three others make up a group called The Strong Women of Tahiti. Mme.

Winkelstroeter's surname is considered by some people difficult to pronounce; one of the Matson captains always refers to her as Madame Apple Strudel.

By this time we were tired. We left Mme. Winkelstroeter's hotel and climbed back aboard ship and I gave the order to hightail it for home. I say we were tired, but I overlooked Ruth Arcaro. "Now," she cried out, "I want to get in some fishing!" Nobody could argue her out of it, including her husband, and he didn't try very hard, being himself a devotee of rod and reel. So Mr. Fog-of-many-owners got out the rods and put the Arcaros into the swivel chairs at the stern and baited their hooks with fish big enough to feed a family of four and promised them at least one marlin apiece.

I thought we would never get home. Ruth Arcaro fishes by the birds. Her eyes dart around the watery horizon and whenever she sees a bird or several birds she sets up a mighty clamor, for this is the sign of the presence of fish. I would be nudging the helmsman, secretly instructing him to point us toward Bar Vaima, and then would come the wild cry from Ruth Arcaro: "A bird! My God a bird! Turn 'er to the right!"



The Great Voyage to Moorea, cartography by Hank Ketcham. Legend is supposed to go with the numbered locations but all I can remember is (10) where Ruth Arcaro cried, "Birds!"

We spent the next hour or so responding to such alarms. Sometimes I thought Ruth would go clean out of her head after sighting entire coveys of birds. We chased birds to the east and then we chased birds to the west and neither Arcaro hook ever touched a marlin or anything else resembling a fish, and at last they both gave up, and we hurried back to Papeete. We plumb forgot the plan to capture the island.

At Bar Vaima we sat around spinning yams, recounting our many harrowing adventures at sea, living once again that awful moment when the peanuts were spilled, recalling die sickening affair of the busted engine, talking once more of the time Ralph Varady lynched himself, and occasionally Mr. Ketcham would interrupt these salty reminiscences with the cry: "Birds! Birds! Turn 'er to the right!"

Above our jolly talk could be heard the rattle of the street traffic and the waterfront noises and, from the juke box in the bar, a twangy voice singing *Put Yore Sweet Lips a Little Closer to the Phone*. We sat relaxed and contented after our great voyage, each feeling himself to be an authentic part of South Sea life; and I heard Ralph tell Eddie Arcaro that the Tahitian language has no single word for horse, that the animal is known as The-Pig-that-runs-fast-over-the-land.

At last the Hotel Tahiti contingent set out westward, with Mr. Ketcham still crying "Birds!" And we went east to Maison Louise where I found a penciled note saying:

sir: Excuse my retard today for hair cut — Because pane de machine. See you tomorrow morning. Salutation.

The machine that was pane was his motorbike.

January 20

OVER THE HILL behind our house is Tahiti's racetrack and I wanted Eddie Arcaro to have a look at it. We drove out there this morning and walked all around the course and inspected the crude little structures and the rickety grandstand. Eddie was interested in the tote-board because he is connected with the Totalizator company back home. There were two betting windows and a sign overhead saying "Pari Mutuel." One window was for twenty-franc bets and one for a hundred francs (\$1.10). After we had taken a few pictures I told Eddie about the actual races and the jockeys. I had not seen a meeting but I had read descriptions in various travel books. The Tahitians rode naked, except for a breechclout and a floral crown, and they were usually drunk, and yelling like Sioux Indians as they roared around the course. Mr. Arcaro is head of the Jockey Guild in America and said that he is always eager to learn from his travels, and that the Tahitian style of riding appeals to him strongly and he would like to see it tried out at Belmont Park and Laurel and Saratoga and Santa Anita.

We went on over to Bill Stone's house and Teuru said that my information about the jockeys was out of date, that in recent years they wear regulation jockey uniforms. There is usually one free-for-all race, she said, in which the natives from around the island bring their own horses, and these horses are ridden by boys and girls in very skimpy attire. Teuru said that on racing days, which come only a couple of times a year, oceans of Hinano are consumed and the last few events on the card are made livelier by flying beer bottles. These are not thrown from motives of anger or animosity, but simply out of exuberant good will. If you are hit in the head by a beer bottle in Tahiti, it is wise to be philosophical about it, and to keep in mind that it was thrown in a spirit of fellowship. The thing to do is to throw one in return. Teuru also told us that it is not unusual for a Tahitian, loaded with Hinano, to enter himself in the final race, line up with the horses and go galloping off in their wake — to the mighty cheers of the throng.

Nelle and I dropped Eddie off at his hotel and by eleven A. M. we were at Ripley Gooding's house for his weekly rum punch party. Each Saturday morning Ripley tries to have people in for two or three hours of drinking and then a big lunch. A year or so ago Ripley was in his bathroom, looking at himself in the mirror as he shaved. He closed his eyes and when he opened them he was looking at the bathroom ceiling. He had collapsed from a combination of internal disorders, and two different doctors told him he had to quit drinking and a diet was prescribed for him. Today, before lunch

started, he had seven rum punches. I counted them. Later on, all during the luncheon, Ripley played it safe, drinking nothing but red wine. There were two kinds of roast duck, the imported French and the local, plus avocado and seafoods and boiled onions and cauliflower in cheese and, finally, a beautiful apple pie. Ripley said he is crazy for apple pie, American style, a taste he developed when he ran his restaurant in San Francisco. He downed a glass of wine and said that the French don't know how to make pies and pastry. "You hear all this talk about French cooking," said Ripley. "Well, it is a lot of bunk. They are lousy cooks. Their sauces are insane concoctions that would ruin a man's liver in a week. On top of that, they never bathe and they all smell like a garbage dump. I tell you, when I have to dance with a Frenchwoman I hold her as far away from me as I can, arm's length, otherwise the smell would knock me to the floor."

There are some people who say that Ripley carries his dislike of the French to unreasonable lengths.

Back in town I ran into the old taxi driver, the cynical one, and stopped to chat with him. He said: "Well, the dirty Territorial Assembly is send five members by first class to Paris to ask for loan of many hundred millions of francs. They want it to fix road, out Punaauia. That is what they say. The dirty swindler bastards will spend fifty millions of it on travel expense and women and wine. Maybe more. I saw their picture in paper, at airport, each one up to his ugly nose in leis, which I hope will choke him to death. I would like to say farewell to the crooks forever the bastards. It is the plan that they raise the money to pay back the loan by push up the tax on gasoline. I hope they fall in the ocean and drown." Each time I come upon this old gentleman and listen to his careful and sober analysis of the local political situation, I resolve that when I get home I will force myself to take a more active part in public affairs.

Tonight we drove with Aurora far out the island to see a movie in one of Tony Bambridge's theaters. We arrived early on purpose because the people of Papara district were having a Saturday night dance. We hung around the *baragues* and listened to the music and observed life and then went into a little Chinese store nearby. It was run by a man named Kui Chong and was typical of the Chinese stores in districts all around the island. The entire room measured no more than twenty-five by thirty feet and I jotted down some of the merchandise that was on display: nails, chicken feed, sweet potatoes, snorkeling equipment, axe handles, wire, fish nets, packaged Chinese vegetables, frying pans, bread, prunes, powdered milk, tin chamber pots, Gerber's rice cereal and oatmeal, savates, scrub brushes, electric fuses, pareu cloth, buttons, paint brushes, breadfruit, cigarette papers, thread, fishing lures, Mum, rope, ketchup, ballpoint pens, soap,

combs, thimbles, grenadine, toilet paper, Thermos bottles, work shirts, lanterns, clothesline, hard candy, cigars, stoves, egg carriers. Plus, of course, a couple of hundred cans of New Zealand corned beef. I remembered another such store we had gone into back toward town a few weeks ago, and I had been mystified by the presence of five shelves stocked with nothing but bottles of capers. I had Aurora ask the Chinese proprietor about it and she reported back to me: "He says he made a little mistake when he ordered."

We drove on down the road to the cobalt blue theater, a structure like a ham, crude in every department but not as primitive as we had expected. The seats were wooden benches and the front half of the theater was filled with kids. We had been warned that rats would likely be running back and forth across our feet, but we saw none; instead, all evening long the kids were running back and forth across our feet. The show was a half hour late starting and then began with a Popeye cartoon in French plus a lot of French newsreels, all showing de Gaulle making speeches or French soldiers on the march. Then came intermission and everyone filed out of the blue barn and ganged up at two little refreshment stands to buy orange pop and ice cream. Twenty minutes later the show resumed, with Coming Attractions that seemed to cover the programming for the next three months. And then the feature, *Meet Me in Las Vegas*, starring Dan Dailey and Cyd Charisse. It is one of the joys of American life that there is a Cyd Charisse, simply because her real name is Tula Ellice Finklea. This feature picture was dubbed in French and since I couldn't understand the dialogue, I paid more attention to the movements and posturing of the actors than usual. I thought Dan Dailey was excellent except that he seemed to do an awful lot of smiling. I mean, when there wasn't really anything to smile about. Cyd Charisse engaged in occasional ballet posturing. She would stand on her toes and then raise her left leg up as high as her head, and stay in that position a while, and this pose brought a lot of loud comment from the young men in the audience. Aurora said these comments were vulgar. She said the young men were saying what they would like to do. She said that vulgar comment from the audience is common custom among movie audiences in the South Pacific. Tahitians, with their broad view of sexual matters, have always made a practice of yelling advice to the characters on the screen. Let a man begin kissing a woman and loud encouragement will come from the audience concerning what he should do to her next.

In former times when old silent pictures were shown, or films with the dialogue in English, it was the custom to have a native interpreter stand at one side of the audience and deliver a running commentary in

Tahitian. One or two of these interpreters became locally famous for their ability to keep the audiences entertained. The basic purpose of the interpreter was to inform the people about what was happening on the screen, but quite often his discourse had nothing to do with the picture. If the action was slow, he might go into a round of local gossip. I have heard of one interpreter who was a great ladies' man and whenever the picture was dull he would begin talking about his latest conquests, and he would describe each affair in great and luscious detail. He would always omit the names of the girls but in Tahiti all such details are known to everyone, and the audience would cry out, "*That* was Lelani!" or some other girl's name.

Baldwin Bambridge told me that in the days when almost all pictures were in English, with no dubbing and no subtitles, the audiences were just as big and just as enthusiastic as ever, and they would protest angrily if the sound failed. Even though they could not understand one word of the dialogue, they would begin stamping and whistling and yelling, "Sond! Sond! Sond!"

A few days ago I sat down with Tony Bambridge himself, and he told me of some of his early experiences showing movies on the island of Raiatea. There was no theater and no building big enough for films so the show was held outdoors. The screen was set up in a vacant yard with houses on either side and all evening long the kids and the pigs and the chickens were galloping back and forth through the audience. Back in 1937 Tony took a silent picture called *Heliotrope* to Raiatea. It was shown at the height of the orange season. The projection booth was a big wooden box in the middle of the audience and every time the machine broke down, which was often, the people rained oranges against the walls of the booth. Tony said that Tom Mix was the favorite movie star in silent days. When the first sound picture, a western, was shown at Raiatea, it opened with a gigantic horse galloping straight toward the audience, his hoofbeats sounding loud and frightening. One Tahitian went screaming up the road, crying for the gendarmes to come and stop the wild animal.

January 21

THE ACHIEVEMENTS and the misfortunes of the missionaries bulk large in the history of Tahiti. At first blush all the quarreling and warring would appear to be full of political complexities, but actually it was all quite simple. There were two sets of people who believed in the divinity of Christ. One set, the British, believed one way; the other set, the French, believed another way. They gunboated and warshipped each other and threatened to blow one another to shreds and nobody asked the Tahitians how *they* felt about the business. They, the natives, were caught between a rock and a hard place, for in those times it was blandly and sincerely assumed that all people except Europeans and Americans were savage animals and didn't know which end was up.

The Protestant missionaries out of England had been in exclusive possession of Tahiti for almost forty years before the first Catholic showed his face. He was an Irish catechist named Colomban Murphy, and he reached Tahiti in 1835 disguised as a carpenter. He wore a thick black beard and smoked a clay pipe and said he was on his way to Hawaii to look for work. The Protestant missionaries saw through his ruse and set up a holler, saying, "My God, Murphy, we come out here and work like dogs for forty years, and get these people all softened up, and now you boys want to move in. Listen, Murphy, there are plenty of other islands out here — go find your own." And they shipped Mr. Murphy out.

One of the unhappiest of the Protestant' missionaries was Brother William Henry, who was stationed on Moorea. His children turned out bad. His friend Brother Bicknell described them this way: "Nancy is a drunkard, a whore, a blasphemer, a deist and a liar; and Sarah has been drunk and is a horrid blasphemer. . . . She wishes the Bibbel in the fire and all of us in Hell and her father, too; herself also, and Jesus Christ. . . . Samuel is a bad boy; he has no employ; he gets drunk."

And then there was the unfortunate John Harris, who came in the first missionary vessel, the *Duff*, in 1797. Two men were to be sent on to the Marquesas and Harris asked to be one of them. Apparently he had read something about those islands that attracted him, and he was eager to go there and convert the heathen. Harris was then thirty-nine years old.

The *Duff* worked her way up to the Marquesas and put Harris and the other missionary ashore. The local chief was just leaving for another island and he instructed his handsome wife to take care of the needs of the two white men. The wife made a few wanton advances

toward Harris but he repulsed her. Then she and some of the other women got together and began whispering about the remarkable whiteness of the visitor's skin. They wondered if he was the same color all over. When night came and he fell asleep, they crept upon him and seized him and took off all his clothes and, finding what they found, they were pleased, and they suggested by sign language that they would like to know Brother Harris a little better. He was horrified, of course. He fought clear of them, minus his clothes, and spent the rest of the night shivering with fright and wailing lugubriously on the beach. Next morning he signaled Captain Wilson of the *Duff* and was taken back on board the ship. Harris told Captain Wilson that he would not remain among such nasty people under any conditions. So Captain Wilson took him back to Tahiti. I have no idea what Captain Wilson thought, but I can imagine. And the several accounts of this incident which I have read say nothing whatever about the other missionary who was put ashore with Harris. His name was William Crook. I do not like to be irreverent, but I can only assume that he saw something he liked and led it into the bushes.

January 22

HAD LUNCH today with Rodney Balmer, an American who has lived here for many years. Rodney went to one of the Ivy League schools and then spent ten years with an advertising agency in New York. He fancied himself as one of the gayest of the gay blades around Manhattan in the 1930s. During his college days and throughout his ten years in New York he perfected and polished certain techniques which he found effective in working his will on women.

"I had half a dozen different systems," he said, "and usually I could tell from looking at a girl which technique I should use on her. I tell you, I was real good — I seldom met defeat. If one system didn't work on a given girl, I'd try another, and sooner or later I'd get her."

From what I could gather the Balmer techniques were subtle and insidious, a delicate blending of the right talk and the right physical procedures. And so Rodney, still a bachelor, came to Tahiti to look after some land he had inherited. He figured that no girl on the island would be able to resist him once he went to work. Right away he met a beautiful and voluptuous girl, half French and half Tahitian, and fell hard for her. He began on her with his most reliable technique but she didn't go for it. The more he labored at his campaign the more she seemed to regard him as slightly insane. He tried another technique, and then another, and still she held out. He couldn't understand it. He went through his entire repertoire, without success. He began to brood about it. And then one evening he was sitting with the girl, feeling wretched about his failure, thinking even that he might break down and marry her, when she said:

"Rodney, you have been acting very strangely all during these weeks I've known you. I haven't been able to figure you out. You are unhappy about something, there is something serious weighing on your mind. Tell me — could it be that you want to go to bed with me?"

Rodney's eyes popped. "Well, well . . . uh, well," he stammered, "that was sorta the general idea."

"Then," she said, "why didn't you ask me?"

Having accumulated, during the last few days, some questions relating to island history, I drove out to Bengt's house again and in a few minutes he rattled off the answers for me. For one thing, I wanted to know how Papeete happened to become the principal harbor of the island. Most of the early explorers and the missionaries and the *Bounty* anchored in Matavai Bay and the first white settlement was on Point Venus there, where the lighthouse now stands, and Captain

Cook's monument. Bengt said that Captain Bligh himself was responsible for the switch to Papeete. The other early visitors had come to Tahiti in the time of good weather, when conditions were ideal in Matavai Bay, but Bligh arrived during the rainy season of 1788. The winds were now westerly and Bligh saw at once that Matavai Bay was not a good year-round anchorage. On Christmas Day of that year he moved the *Bounty* around to a better harbor, and so the future settlement of Papeete was assured.

Aurora took us this afternoon to call on Anna Chevalier, once famous the world over as Reri, the beautiful native girl who was star of the motion picture *Tabu*. She was plucked out of obscurity and given the lead in the picture, and it was a sensation around the world, and so was she. In New York Florenz Ziegfeld saw the film and sent at once for "Reri" and put her into his Follies. She was the toast of Broadway, and then went to Europe, and got married to a Pole and lived in Warsaw for several years. I must explain at this point that all Tahitians drink much more than other people think proper, and Anna was no exception. In New York and in Europe she retained the Polynesian attitude toward work and punctuality and anything else that might interfere with the leisurely way of life. And so she landed back in Tahiti. She keeps house for her sister in a cottage not far from the Mormon church, and she is still a handsome and spirited woman. A strange thing happened to me after we sat down and began talking. There were several photographs in the room, showing her as she was when she played in *Tabu*, and when I saw her as she looked in 1930 I remembered. As a young reporter in New York I had called on her and talked with her and written a story about her. But I was so starry-eyed then, meeting each day some new and world-famous celebrity, that I can remember very little about interviewing the girl from Tahiti.

Anna said that one print of the film *Tabu* still exists in Tahiti and it is resurrected from time to time and shown in one of the local theaters. She said she doesn't go see it any more because it makes her feel old. In former times she enjoyed seeing it for the audience reaction to one particular line she spoke. Everybody in Tahiti knew, of course, that Anna has always been a hard drinker. There is a scene in the picture where someone tries to force a drink of liquor on the native girl Reri, whereupon she cries out in protest: "No! It makes me dizzy!" This line always brought shrieks of laughter from the Tahitian audiences, as well as from Anna herself.

She told us that the handsome Tahitian boy who played opposite her in *Tabu* is still around, works in a Papeete garage, and is still a handsome man though his hair is now white. He was recently engaged to play a Tahitian chief in the new screen version of *Mutiny on the*

Bounty.

January 23

PRESTON MOORE told me some things today about Harrison Smith, the man who brought so many new flowers and fruits to Tahiti. Smith led a simple life and disliked parties and noisy gatherings of any kind. When Caroline Guild and her husband had their big house in operation they were the society leaders of the island and their parties were famous. Once, and only once, they managed to beguile Harrison Smith away from his hermitage and talked him into attending one of their brawls. The party was half over before anyone noticed that the little scientist had decorated himself for the occasion. He said that if he was going to move in high society circles, he intended being socially correct in all things. He had on open-toed sandals and he had covered his toenails with red barn paint.

Smith would not have a telephone in his house and communicated with his friends by notes. He was a sun-worshiper and often wandered around his property without any clothes on. Obviously he didn't like for people to drop in on him unannounced and uninvited. "I refuse," he once told Preston Moore, "to share other people's boredom."

January 24

IF ANYONE should be wondering how we happen to meet so many different people from day to day, the answer is simple. Strangers stop and speak to one another in a place like Tahiti. This happens on the street, in the stores, in the bars and in the restaurants. It is the normal thing to strike up a conversation with the people who are at the next table to you.

Today during lunch at the Hotel Tahiti I fell into conversation with an American lawyer who is here for one week. He said he flew out from California and I told him I came by ship and I thought it a pleasant way to travel. He said he could never "dawdle" his way by ship or train. He was for the jets, first, last and always. There is large conceit in this attitude, so common nowadays among businessmen. A man gets to believing that his time is too valuable for him to waste any of it on ship or train. Such a man has too high an estimate of his own importance. He regards himself as dynamic and indispensable. I imagine he shudders when he thinks that he may some day drop dead, for the world could not get along without him. He is unable to see that, in the over-all scheme, he is just another worm.

Following lunch I was introduced to one of the leading dentists of Papeete, but the meeting was brief and I didn't get to discuss the problem of bad teeth among Tahitian girls. This dentist speaks good English and therefore gets many tourists as customers. He told me frankly that he hates American women. I asked why, and he said: "They all walk with their knees out in front of them." He added that it sickens him to see the way the American woman nags and browbeats her husband. "Sometimes," he said, "I will have an American man in my chair, and his wife will insist on being present, standing right beside us, and the wife will not let the husband tell me which tooth it is that hurts. *She* will tell me. She will say, 'Open your mouth, Jim. Now doctor, it is the one right here.' Just imagine it! The poor man is not even permitted to point out his own aching tooth."

This gentleman, of course, is dead wrong. I mean about the knees.

The dining table at our house is now a conglomerate confusion of stacked books, pamphlets, maps, stationery, tools, spray cans, and piles of notes that have been scribbled in out-of-the-way places. I have somehow managed to pull together three notations concerning Captain Cook.

The great navigator came to Tahiti in 1769 to observe the transit of Venus across the sun. Of this matter Austin Peterson writes: "We all know Cook could probably have viewed Venus just as easily from London but after all, Tahiti on an expense account is not to be sneezed

at.”

In one of the books it is said that when the Tahitian natives first saw Cook and his officers in their tricorne hats, they believed these were men whose heads had corners on them.

There is a fine incident from *The Life and Voyages of Capt. Joshua Slocum*. When Slocum arrived in Queensland he was greeted by a reception committee at Cooktown, and the committee offered to show him “the very spot where Captain Cook was murdered.” Slocum already knew, of course, that Cook was killed in Hawaii, and he was debating in his mind whether he should say so when a young man whispered to him: “ ’E wasn’t killed ’ere at all, sir, ’e was killed in Hafrica — a lion ate ’im.”

Finally, in all that mess of paper, I find a slip on which, in my handwriting, are the words:

tsutsugamushi fever

I can’t remember writing them. I don’t know what they mean. I don’t want to know.

January 25

TWO OF THE more interesting members of the American colony have been missing from the island during our visit. They are Eddie Lund and Fred Cole. Eddie Lund is the musician who ran Quinn's for many years and who walked around the streets of Papeete with a pet pig on a leash. In recent years he has devoted himself to producing long-play recordings of Tahitian music. He has been traveling in the States during the last few months and I am sorry we have missed him, because he is the final authority on the island rhythms.

Fred Cole, who became famous as a maker of swimming clothes in California, is now retired and lives on the west shore of the island. He has been away in the States but he arrived back this morning and we went to the airport to witness his homecoming. It was a rather festive occasion because Mr. Cole was bringing back a bride. He sent word a few days ago that he had married an American girl who has been a recent resident of Tahiti. At the airport much rice was thrown, and old shoes and tin cans were tied to the Cole automobile, and someone wired a smoke bomb under the hood but it didn't go off.

From the airport everyone went to the Hotel Tahiti for breakfast and we found Eddie Arcaro, who is known as the millionaire jockey, up and taking care of his business interests. He was talking on the phone to someone in Los Angeles and several tourists were hanging around, waiting for him to finish, eager to ask him what is going on back in the good ole U.S.A. Eddie talks with someone in the States almost every day, for he is a man with important business investments, and the tourists are always after him for news. Today when he finished his conversation he said, "It's snowing in Los Angeles." Everyone thought for a moment that Eddie was having his little joke, but he wasn't. It was snowing in Los Angeles.

Ripley Gooding came by the house late today with an armful of books which he thought might be of help to me. I noted among them works by Frederick O'Brien, Herman Melville and Jack London. Tonight I went to work on *The Cruise of the Snark* and discovered, much to my surprise, that Jack London, the Old Socialist, was a first-rate humorist.

January 26

Ralph Varady tries to keep me posted on the arrival of celebrities. There are always famous visitors on hand to enliven the local scene. A visiting celebrity is certain of getting a lot of attention because the leading hostesses of the island are Lion Hunters of great skill and experience, and they compete with one another for possession of the physical bodies of the great ones. Today Ralph asked me if I knew Frederick Loewe, who wrote the music for *My Fair Lady* and other successful productions. Mr. Loewe is here and I thought at once of that interview he gave John Crosby and how he spoke of his boyhood ambition to have his own boat and sail it to the South Seas. So I told Ralph that I would be most eager to make Mr. Loewe's acquaintance.

There was, however, a matter of greater importance to occupy my mind this day. I must go back to a fateful morning last week when a frightening-looking summons came from the police, ordering us to report at their headquarters at eight o'clock on the morning of January 26th. I have been deeply worried about this thing for days and indulged myself in a few nightmares over it. I have heard so much in recent weeks about the arrogance and hatefulness of the French *fonctionnaires*, and the insanity of their laws, that by last night I was certain that Nelle and I were destined for the dungeons. I had no inkling of why they wanted us. I reflected bitterly on the fact that their ignorant law holds a person is guilty until he proves himself innocent. They are savages. *Worse* than savages. I have been opening my big ears to all that vicious talk directed against them and now they have found out and they are going to give me the business. And here we are, without an American consul to get word to the White House or the United Nations or somebody, to let them know that we are under cruel persecution in a foreign land. If these French bastards were sore enough, and I was sure they were, they'd probably torture us. Meaning both me and Nelle. Torturing women! My God, how low can a so-called civilized nation sink?

I went around town for a couple of days showing my summons to various American friends. Some of them studied it and went "Hmmmmmm!" and then said I should not cross any bridges until I came to them. It was clear that these people expected the very worst for us, but didn't want to spoil our final hours of blessed freedom. Others looked at the paper and said they had never seen such a thing before, that this was something new to them. As if to say, the fiendish frogs have thought up some new hellish persecution for Americans they don't like. I told myself we should have stayed home,

we should have stayed in our own lovely land of liberty. But now it was too late. These dirty no-good French bastards — we'd saved their damned country time after time, and now look.

I was in a bad state of nerves as we drove from the house to the police station at half past seven this morning. Nelle tried to soothe me by saying it would be a mere nothing, involving some minor technicality, but I responded by barking at her, shouting that she knows nothing about such matters, that she has no suspicion of the horrors that await an American who falls afoul of a foreign government, especially a *French* government. "God damn it," I yelled, "don't you understand? This is *international!*"

I decided to go down with a defiant taunt on my lips. I would have my sardonic answers ready. When they put the screws to me I would draw myself up, square my jaw, and say, "Monsieur *le prefet*, there is a dead cat in the middle of the road out near the Fatuaua Bridge. I would recommend that you do something toward earning your salary, and go out there and remove the carcass from the pavement." Such haughtiness might mean an extra eight or ten years in the *oubliettes*, with lashes, but I had my American pride.

We were directed to an office near the entrance gate at headquarters. There were three men sitting at desks. It was a grubby office, right out of a Dickens novel — the furniture was shabby and chipped, all the equipment looked cheap and ancient and *mean*. Two of the insolent *fonctionnaires* fitted perfectly into the dank and ominous scene; they were older men, and they had a sour and shabby look. They hated the whole damn world and most of all, I could tell, they hated Americans. The third was a much younger man and he was the one who came forward. He was polite enough, but he didn't smile. He was clearly a slave in the thrall of these older villains. He asked for our passports and I handed them over. He flipped them open and examined them and then went to the meanest looking of the other men. Now the pair of them inspected those passports and whispered to each other at some length, and the older man looked up and glared at me for a long moment. Oh God, I thought. It's even worse than I anticipated. The son of a bitch wants my blood. I could hear chains rattling, dungeon doors creaking. Then the younger man came back and said to me:

"Your visa is only for one month. You have been here almost two months. How do you explain thees?"

Thinking back on it, I know I played the fool. I flung up my hands in a dramatic gesture. "Good Lord!" I cried. "I thought all the time that it was for six months. The versa. The visa. That's what I thought. At the consulate in New York. Such a nice French fellow. Gentleman. He stamped it. I thought it was six months. Oh, Monsieur, how sorry I

am that this should have happened!"

The older man got up from his desk and came at me. He was going to take over. I thought: here it comes. He walked up to the counter, stared me straight in the eye, and said: "Please to don't get excited. Please to don't worry yourself. It is only a little mistake. We will fix it. How long do you wish to remain in Tahiti?"

"Well," I said, gulping and breathing hard, "we planned to sail on the *Mariposa* on March fourth."

"Very well," he said. "We will fix it for two more months, in case you feel that you want to stay a little longer."

When they got it all corrected the young man said it would be five hundred francs. I gave him a thousand franc note and he handed it to the third man in the room. This fellow opened a drawer in his battered desk and took out a cardboard box which said:

BAUER & BLACK
Abdominal Belt
30-32

The box contained money and the man fished around in it, getting my change, and then we departed. Walking back to the Dauphine I said to Nelle:

"It is quite apparent to me that these French *fonctionnaires* are being misjudged by the whole American colony. Did you ever meet such a nice and accommodating bunch of guys in your whole life? Real gentlemen. And that office! Those miserable desks! They deserve better from their motherland. Here they are, thousands of miles from their loved ones, stuck off here in the remote reaches of the South Pacific, serving their country efficiently and without complaint, and they are given pigsties for offices. I have half a mind to start a local campaign and raise a fund and buy those nice guys some new office furniture."

I was feeling so exhilarated by the whole thing that I decided to celebrate, even at that hour of the day, and so we drove out to the Hotel Tahiti and settled down in the bar. Along came smiling Genevieve, the hotel hostess, and told us that Frederick Loewe was at another table and had been asking for us. The Hank Ketchams, their nerves shattered from that harrowing experience aboard the *Fiesta*, had gone back to Honolulu. There they had run into Mr. Loewe and when they learned he was planning a side-trip to Tahiti, they suggested that he look us up.

We went to the table where he was sitting with two women. One was Miss Gollub, a lady journalist. The other woman was described as Miss Gollub's secretary. Both gals were belting away at the hard sauce. They said they were having a ball, that they had not been to bed all

night, and that they simply adored every inch of Tahiti. Fritz Loewe just sat and glared at them.

He is a small, thin man with delicate, handsome features, the soft flowing hair of an artist, and a deceptive air of the pure ascetic. He speaks normally with a soft, musical voice that belies the vast oceans of indignation that are usually boiling inside him.

"You have finally made it to Tahiti," I said. "You have finally realized your boyhood ambition. So, what do you think of it?"

He seized his head in his hands. "It is horrible," he said. "Horrible beyond description. It is the most horrible dump I have ever had the misfortune to visit."

Miss Gollub and her secretary got up and sailed off for the rest room, and Mr. Loewe now told us that he had met them on the plane, that they had found out who he was, and that they had taken charge of him.

"I spent last night in a so-called bungalow here at this hotel," he said. "I am a very sensitive man and the noise of the traffic on the highway was simply deafening all night. I did not sleep one wink. This is an accursed place. I got up at daybreak this morning and found this harridan, this Gollub, and told her that I would have to move to some other place. I can't get a plane out today or I would leave instantly. This Gollub creature contends that she knows Tahiti well. I believed her at first, on the plane, and let myself get sucked into her trap. She telephoned another hotel, a rat-trap up the road from here, and I have moved into a so-called bungalow there. It is much worse than this place, and this place is a hell-hole. My new residence is surrounded by ghastly land-crabs and the bungalow is swarming with spiders and other insects. When I am in that place I feel like Gauguin."

As we talked a clear picture began to take form. Frederick Loewe is a walking encyclopedia of the multifarious discomforts and aches and tribulations and nuisances that plague the human race. He is continually beset by them, all of them. He spends his life cursing them and trying to flee from them.

He is a true gourmet. Once in Hollywood he was telling a friend about a certain kind of sausage that is available only in Vienna. Suddenly Fritz stopped talking, picked up a phone, reserved two seats on a plane, flew to Vienna with his friend, ate the sausages, and then flew back to California. A gourmet is, by the very nature of things, obliged to live a life of unhappiness, especially if he travels a lot. The food in nine out of ten places around the world is bound to be nauseating to him. I will refrain from quoting Mr. Loewe's words on the subject of Tahiti's food. They were searing. They were explosive. And when he had finished I said:

"Look, man, don't be wishy-washy in your opinions. Don't shilly-

shally. State your position. Clarify your views. You don't have to hold back on account of me."

"All my life," he said a bit later, "I have heard of the alluring and sensuous girls of Tahiti. I have always wanted to look at them, to become closely acquainted with them. I said as much to Gollub on the plane. She is a neurotic, boozing busybody. The first thing she did on arrival here was to go to this hideous dive called Quinn's and round up an even dozen of the girls who hang out there. She brought them here to this hotel yesterday — twelve of them — to have lunch with me, so that I could have my pick of the lot. Or, as she put it, I could take them all on if I felt like it. Great God! You should have seen them! Slavering, diseased beasts! Every one of them. Their teeth were either missing altogether, or black with decay. Their legs were covered with sores. Their feet were huge and covered with calluses and knots the size of walnuts. They were not girls — they were festering monsters. I have the misfortune to be a gentleman so I sat with them and smiled back at them and it was all I could do to keep from vomiting on the table."

That is one of his major difficulties, the fact of being an incurable gentleman. He has an old-world courtliness which precludes his ever being outspokenly rude to any woman. On the plane he had committed himself to Miss Gollub as a guide to Tahiti and now he could not throw her out.

It made me unhappy that he was so disappointed in Tahiti. It was obvious that he had not seen any of the island's good things. I told him so, and suggested that we'd like for him to see our house and a couple of other interesting places. He duped the two women by sending them on an errand and we got into the Dauphine and drove out to Maison Louise. He loved it, until he noticed that we had no screens and that our rooms were wide open to the great outdoors. Didn't we have insects in this neighborhood? I said we had plenty of them, and he grimaced. I wanted him to walk around the garden with us, and smell the white ginger, but he begged off, saying that the scent of flowers nauseates him. "Everywhere I turn on this island," he said, "some godawful woman is throwing a lei of flowers over my head. They come at me in battalions and it is all I can do to keep from throwing up in their faces."

He stayed with us the rest of the day and we drove out to One Tree Hill and looked at the blue expanse of Matavai Bay and he actually exclaimed over the beauty of it, and then we took him by to meet Bill Stone and see his fine house, and he was happy about that. Later we went to the Hotel Taaone for dinner and there she was — Miss Gollub, complete with secretary — and so we became a fivesome and Fritz went into a smoldering sulk.

One of the many things that he disliked about Miss Gollub was her persistent effort to speak French. She was trying to read the Taaone's menu aloud and Fritz began making pointed remarks. "I detest noises of any kind," he said. "I cannot stand the noise made by a small cricket. Once at the home of Burgess Meredith a rooster with a voice defect was waking me up each morning and making my life miserable. I finally borrowed a shotgun and went out and stalked that beast and killed it — and I have never had such a sensation of pleasure as came to me when the charge hit that bird and sent the feathers flying. But let me tell you this: the worst noise of all, the worst noise on earth, is the sound of some idiot trying to speak a foreign language when she doesn't know the first thing about it."

Miss Gollub, who already had demonstrated that she has the skin of an alligator, went right on with her garbling of the menu.

Fritz found the mushrooms cooked to his liking, and thought the mango he had for dessert was superb, and the manners and personality of Serge, the young waiter captain, appealed to him. I thought that things were improving rapidly for him, but then a native dance troupe came into the dining room and the drums started and over toward the lagoon the crickets were beginning to sing. Fritz finished off his coffee and stood up.

"I am going back to that filthy pig pen they call a hotel," he said. "I am going to try to get some sleep. I am taking the plane out of here tomorrow."

At the entrance he ordered the two women to take a taxi, and he rode out to his hotel with us. I told him he ought to spend a little time on the waterfront tomorrow, and he said he would much prefer to stay in bed with the covers over his head until plane time. But he agreed to meet us at Bar Vaima.

January 27

FRITZ LOEWE was somewhat more cheerful when we found him sitting at the sidewalk cafe. Yesterday he had complained that the grayness of Tahiti was depressing but today the sun was shining and the gray was gone.

He reported that he is no longer interested in Tahiti's girls. "I had another bad night," he said. "I just got to sleep in my little cesspool when a noise woke me up. I heard all this yelling and giggling outside and I got up and had a look. There were five Tahitian girls and one man. They all filed into the bungalow next door to mine. They played music. They tried to sing. There would be moments of silence, and then some giggling, and then whooping and yelling. It is my considered opinion that some kind of a sex circus was in progress. It is also my considered opinion that this is an island of perverts and degenerates. That party didn't break up until after dawn. I'm glad I am not a big man. I would have gone over and strangled every one of them."

I asked him if he plans to work on another musical show and he closed his eyes in pain. "I have no hesitation in telling you," he said, "that I am a multimillionaire. I will soon come into another fortune with the sale of motion picture rights to *My Fair Lady*. I have a good record of achievement behind me. I wrote the music for the most successful musical show in history — *My Fair Lady*. I wrote the music for the most successful musical motion picture in history — *Gigi*. Work is work, and I hate it. I never intend to write another line of music. The world managed to keep turning without my music for a long time. I'm sure it will continue turning without me. Four years ago I had a bad heart attack. I am now sixty years old. I shall never need money. Without ever touching my capital I have an income each year of more than three hundred thousand dollars. Why should I work when I hate work?"

He tries to keep himself amused today by travel and he has just recently been in Japan. He still has that yacht on the French Riviera. He keeps a penthouse in New York City as a sort of way station in his travels. He has a fine house in Palm Springs. He has worked out a schedule for himself that takes care of the entire year except for the month of September.

That month has him bothered. What to do with himself in September? He may decide to go to Japan each September because he likes the food there and he likes the people. "They are the most genuinely courteous people on earth," he said. When he is on the Riviera he lives aboard his yacht because he cannot stand the people

on shore.

He said that he will never answer a telephone except in cases of extreme emergency. He has hated the telephone since childhood. When he was about six years old in Vienna he answered a call and someone said, "Your Uncle Fritz just shot and killed himself." He had enjoyed ice cream with Uncle Fritz the day before, and the shock of that call turned him against the telephone. During twenty years of hard times in the United States, when he was often hungry, he waited for the telephone to ring with some kind of a job offer, and it never did, and so his hatred of the instrument never diminished. "Today," he said, "if the phone rings, it can mean either good news or it can mean bad news. I don't want the bad news and I no longer have any need for good news, so the hell with it."

I asked him where he stays when he is in Hawaii and he said the Royal Hawaiian, but that he couldn't sleep there on account of the hellish mynah birds. I told him that I had written extensively about the mynah bird problem at the Royal, and how the hotel management had never been able to discover a way to get rid of them. "It should be simple," said Fritz. "Station two men with shotguns at the foot of those trees and let them blaze away for two or three days. No more mynah birds." I explained that such a procedure was unthinkable, because of the pressures from various humane groups. "Great God!" he cried. "Do you mean to say that there are people who place the welfare of those nasty, fiendish birds above the welfare of human beings?"

About this time Miss Gollub and her secretary arrived, accompanied by a Tahitian girl decorated like a circus horse. Apparently Miss Gollub was still determined to find a Polynesian babe who would suit the exquisite tastes of Fritz Loewe. This one was a beaut, built like a piano-mover. She looked as if she could handle more men than Mamie Stover, on Mamie's best day. She stood on the sidewalk, adjusted her floral crown, and indulged in droll and wanton tricks. She stood facing Fritz, undulating her middle section in a manner meant to arouse the beast in him. She was drunk, and she punctuated her body movements with cries of, "God damn, henrymiller, god damn, henrymiller, hell god damn, henry-miller me!" Fritz sat and stared at this performance for a while, a sardonic grin on his face, and then excused himself, saying he was going to the rest room. He vanished into the back of the barroom and I knew he was escaping out the back door, so Nelle and I vanished in the direction of the yacht *Wanderlure*. The Heintzes were finally pulling out for Samoa and more distant ports and their sailing party was now in progress. I wanted to give Commodore Heintz the benefit of all my experiences during the voyage of the *Bateau Fiesta*. I told him

to watch the peanuts and that the presence of birds over the water means no fish. The *Wanderlure* was crowded with well-wishers, for the Heintzes made many friends during their long stay in Tahiti.

Tonight we went early to the airport for the departure of Fritz Loewe. He was there early, too, having eluded the two women again. He was skipping around like a boy, with a Scotch highball in his hand, and enjoying the company of Jim Dolan and Woody Walsh. Mr. Dolan is an amiable and convivial saloon keeper from Waikiki and Mr. Walsh is Hawaiian manager for South Pacific Air Lines.

We were all having a splendid time and then two taxicabs pulled up and disgorged Miss Gollub, her secretary, their luggage, six or seven *vahines* including this afternoon's sidewalk performer, and two *mahus* with tight trousers and lovely hair waves. The *vahines* and the *mahus*, on orders from Miss Gollub, swarmed around Fritz, trying to drape leis on him, trying to kiss him on both cheeks, howling their farewells. He fought them off, however, and made wide, skirting end runs from one side of the room to the other. Eventually Miss Gollub and her party retired to the bar for some final, furious drinking. Miss Gollub herself looked up once and spotted me and came over and said she had a great story for my book. She gave me the name of a Tahitian girl and said I should go visit her in the prison. The girl is in jail for stealing a Vespa.

"She could ged oud if she wanned to," said Miss Gollub, whose tongue had thickened in the stress of Tahitian life. "Bud she don' wanna ged oud. She likes it there. The meals are better than she gets outside. She geds plenty of nookie from the jailers. She don't have no worries."

"Why should I want to see her?" I asked.

"Begaws," said Miss Gollub, "she is the Sinadra of the island."

"You mean she's a singer?"

"No. She's the head of Quinn's rat pack."

I saw Fritz Loewe standing in the center of the big room, his highball in one hand, his travel kit in the other. He had a forlorn look. The time was growing short, and I went over to him and we talked some more.

I asked him if he was happy and he said he was.

"There are really a great many things in life that I enjoy," he said. "I've got all this money and maybe I have a few more years to live. I have no relatives, and very few friends. Actually, I can't say that I have a real *close* friend anywhere on earth." He paused as a voice in French announced the imminent departure of the plane. "But," he continued, "there are a few people I like, a few who have been kind to me when I needed kindness. They are the people who will get my money when I die."

I moved swiftly. I ran like hell for the bar to get him one more Scotch highball before his departure.

January 28

THIS BEING a wet day I stayed home and made an effort to get straightened out on the matter of Nails for Romance. This refers to an exchange program between the men of the *Dolphin*, under Captain Samuel Wallis, and the inhabitants of Tahiti nearly two hundred years ago.

For a long time I have been hearing stories about how European and American sailors all but dismantled their ships in the early days of South Sea exploration, pulling out nails which they used to trade for the favors of Polynesian girls. I have heard that these things took place in Hawaii, as well as in other Pacific Islands. Perhaps they did, but it seems probable that the stories all stem from the experience of the *Dolphin*.

This ship, the first foreign vessel ever to visit Tahiti, spent about a month in Matavai Bay in 1767 and after some serious fighting settled down to a period of friendly trading. The *Dolphin* carried toys and beads and buttons but it was soon found that the natives wanted nails more than anything else.

A price scale was soon established: a three-inch nail for a hog, a two and three-quarter inch nail for a roasting pig, a one and three-quarter inch nail for a fowl or a cluster of fruit.

Such was the Tahitian passion for nails that they soon began coming out in canoes, bringing their loveliest girls. Arriving near the ship, these girls would stand up in the canoes, remove their pareus, and then begin to play the same kind of droll and wanton tricks that were executed by that girl yesterday. They would conduct themselves provocatively and the sailors, lining the rail, would conduct themselves provocatively right back at them, to show them they knew what was meant by the droll and wanton tricks. I earnestly wish I had a color film of these proceedings, if only eight-millimeter; I'm sure such a film would outgross the new *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

The Tahitian girls had certain signals which told the visiting sailors what they would be willing to do in exchange for one nail. The men of the *Dolphin*, in the face of all this, were "mad keen to land" and those who had been on the sick list for weeks began to snap out of it and ask if they might not be taken ashore where, they said, the nice air and fresh water and ripe fruit would do them a world of good.

It is recorded that an Irish seaman named Paddy went ashore with a landing party and was badly beaten up by his companions, "for not beginning his love-making more decently, in some house or at the back of some bushes or a tree." Paddy had a good excuse for his conduct. He said that he merely wanted to make history, he wanted to

be the first European to possess a Tahitian girl, and he didn't want to waste the time looking for a secluded spot.

Captain Wallis could not understand why the natives were so eager for nails as against other articles, though he was informed that they used them for fishhooks and for boring holes in their canoes. Wallis once had a group of natives brought on board and laid out a row of gold and silver coins from various European countries, and with the coins a few nails, and then indicated that the natives were to help themselves. They passed up the money and grabbed for the nails.

After a while it became apparent that most of the ship's nails were being spent on girls instead of pigs. In one instance a seaman was accused of paying too big a spike nail for a bit of romance on shore; he defended himself satisfactorily by saying that he got "double value" for the spike. The cleats, used to belay the ropes which manipulated the sails, were pulled off the sides of the ship for the nails that were in them. The spikes used to hold up hammocks vanished and the men were all sleeping on deck. It may well be that Captain Wallis decided to sail away from Tahiti because of the vanishing nails, else his ship might have fallen to pieces.

At the beginning of this small but colorful episode in world commerce, the girls of Tahiti were primitive and unspoiled, and they had no business sense, no talent for bargaining. If a sailor had come along and offered a girl one carpet tack, she'd have accepted with pleasure. Gradually, however, the *vahines* learned of the power that is implicit in the phrase, "Nothing doing." A sailor offered them a nail, and they said, "Nothing doing," and the sailor then came through with a hammock spike. This interesting procedure is not known to women elsewhere in the world and I set it down with some reluctance; I dislike the thought of American women finding out about it. It has been handed down from generation to generation in Tahiti and American residents have told me that the price of a good *vahine* has rocketed upward in recent years. A dozen years ago a Tahitian girl could be had for one American cigarette, unfiltered. Soon it required a whole package. After that a bee-sick-lette was demanded, or nothing doing. Then the girls insisted on Mobilettes, and from there the price of possession jumped to a Vespa. As of today, the real choice *vahines*, the ones with fair teeth and unblemished skin, demand a Dauphine. There are even some hussies, an American told me, shaking with indignation, who have the gall to insist upon legal marriage. "The world," he said, "has truly gone to hell."

Austin Peterson, who learned his anthropology through years of dose association with the radio and television crowds in Hollywood, made a study of the *vahine* as she shapes up in the 1960s. Mr. Peterson interviewed scores of Tahitian girls, asking them what they liked most

in life. The score: (1) a vigorous man; (2) a motor scooter, and (3) beer. When Mr. Peterson published his scholarly findings they were loudly disputed by certain male residents of the island. They said that most *vahines* prefer (2) over (1) and many of them like (3) better than (2) and all of them use (1) as a means of acquiring (2) and (3). Anthropology is a difficult and tricky science.

In order to furnish my readers with an accurate picture of the traffic in nails at the time the *Dolphin* was here, I had to spend some time digging in the history books. In the course of this research I came upon one fact that makes me swell with pride. The Tahitians had no metal on their island, so they used bone in the making of their tools and weapons. They told Captain Wallis that human bone is far and away the best bone for these purposes. There you are. Man is superior to other animals.

January 29

FRITZ LOEWE has gone, and the Ketchams, but we still have the Arcaros and the Jim Dolans. Mr. Dolan is a chess-playing, book-reading, boat-loving, whiskey-drinking citizen of Honolulu. He owns Dolan's Steak House in Waikiki and a car rental agency. He is great company, although I must say that I have difficulty tolerating the cynicism with which he regards the world.

For the reason that he has a strong personal as well as professional relationship with booze, I took him this afternoon to King Pomare's Tomb. I showed him the urn and told him the story.

"It is not a Benedictine bottle," said Mr. Dolan. "And I will promise you that this joker did not drink himself to death with Benedictine. It would take a true monster to become a Benedictine drunk. A drinking man is capable of great and fantastic achievement, but this would be pretty close to impossible. There are so many better liquids to employ if you want to drink yourself to death." Mr. Dolan began naming them. He named maybe a hundred. He made them all sound good. We hurried back to the Hotel Tahiti where Eddie Arcaro joined us in trying a few.

January 30

IF I have not described them carefully enough, let me once again speak of the characters who come off the smaller yachts that tie up from time to time along the waterfront. Many of these people are dirty and ragged and unshaven.

Such a lack of personal daintiness is understandable when they are at sea, but they would make a better impression on the populace if they would wash themselves and slap a little underarm deodorant here and there when they arrive in port. I mention them again for the reason that they figure in an incident of this day's events.

This afternoon Jeanne Jacquemin had us over to her beach house, a lovely spot nestled up against the lagoon. Jeanne's servant girl, a native of the Cook Islands, brought drinks to us as we lounged in beach chairs at the water's edge. Then she retired to sit in the crook of a *hau* tree nearby, staring at us and listening to us talk. We had heard a story about her. She was working for Jeanne, leading an exemplary life, when a man from the Cooks came to Papeete. He had a grudge against this girl, and he was going around town making slanderous remarks about her, saying she was a thief and a cheat and that any man who fooled around with her would get the crotch-owls. Word of these libels reached the girl. It is said in the South Pacific that if you want to trifle with a woman, make certain she is not a Cook Islander. The day this girl heard of the slanderous things being said against her, she finished up her chores at the Jacquemin house, put a flower in her hair, climbed on her bike and headed for the waterfront. She stood in front of Bar Vaima for an hour or two and then she saw her enemy approaching. There were no words exchanged. She simply seized hold of him, hurled him to the sidewalk, and then beat hell out of him right in front of the whole town.

We sat a long while by the lagoon and watched the dark come on and someone mentioned the Hotel Arahiri further out the island as a place to get good Chinese food. So we piled into our cars and drove out there. It turned out to be a beautiful scenic spot. We had drinks on a terrace beside the water and when the food was ready, moved to a table inside. After a while I took notice of the people at a big table next to us. There were ten of them, including three or four tough looking girls. They were drinking wine and they were noisy. The men all looked dirty, and wore whiskers, and had on odd garments. The girls were of the beat type, without makeup, their hair stringy and unkempt. It was obvious that this gang came off one of the yachts, and I called Jeanne Jacquemin's attention to them, because Jeanne usually knows everything there is to know about what's going on in

Tahiti. She looked them over, murmuring that they were speaking French, and agreed with me that they were a pretty sleazy-looking crowd and probably off a newly arrived boat. Yet, she said, she hadn't noticed them around town during the day. She summoned the Chinese manager and asked him about them, and he told her who they were. They were members of a French motion picture company, headed up by director Roger Vadim, former husband of Brigitte Bardot. They were in Tahiti shooting a story about a group of human derelicts on a dirty old schooner. They had come in late from shooting and hadn't had time to clean themselves up for dinner. They were staying in bungalows here at the little hotel.

In the light of this surprising information my whole attitude changed. I looked at those girls and saw beyond their stringy hair and their lack of makeup and their rude clothes. I saw beauty, and grace, and powerful elements of sex. There were strong traces of the Bardot image among those girls. A few minutes ago they had been filthy bums, trash, scum. Now I'd have cut off my right arm if one of them would have accompanied me on a walk up the beach. And the men, now that I knew they were French movie actors, I could see beyond those whiskers and detect strength and character and virility in their handsome faces. Altogether a charming lot of artistic people.

January 31

WE CHOSE the last day of the month to visit Little Tahiti, across the Isthmus of Taravao, and so early this morning we set out with Aurora Natua, traveling down the eastern shore of the bigger island. By now we know almost every kilometer of the western shoreline, for most of our friends live over there. It is still a great experience to drive down the windward coast, through the area where Captain Louis Antoine de Bougainville came ashore just a few months after Wallis had departed.

Some strange things happened to the people under Bougainville's command but this is not a history so I shall bypass them and relate but one episode in connection with his visit — a matter that has been overlooked by most of the modern writers. On board one of the two French ships was a certain Mlle. Jeanne Baret, the first white woman ever to visit Tahiti and the first white woman ever to circumnavigate the globe. Bougainville didn't know he had an attractive female with him, for she was disguised as a man and was manservant to a naturalist named Commencon. As far as I can make out, none of the men in the French expedition, including even Commencon, knew that a woman was traveling with them. So now arose a situation in which the Tahitians proved that they know a good deal more about sex than white men. They took one look at Commencon's manservant and began pointing and chattering and laughing, for they knew at once that it was a woman. In their own humorous fashion they called out to her that they would be willing to accommodate her in the things she was cut out to do. Bougainville and the other Frenchmen still didn't catch on and Mlle. Jeanne Baret still might have escaped detection but for the impulsiveness of a big Tahitian who, overcome with feeling, picked her up and started to run off with her and make good on the shouted suggestions. Now the French girl stood exposed, and she confessed to Bougainville. He was quite stern about it, but she told him that she was an orphan and convinced him that she had not revealed her sex to any man of the expedition. She may even have struck some kind of a bargain with him, because he let her finish out the voyage around the world.

Our Tahitian scholar, Aurora, was in good form this morning. She talked at length about Bougainville. In Papenoo district she told us about a local dog that loves coconut meat and knows how to get it. This dog has learned how to remove the husks from coconuts, and if he finds these husks to be too thick and tough for his teeth, he carries the nuts to the lagoon and soaks them in water until they are pliable.

I took notice of an interesting fact about Aurora's conversation. She

uses the word "doubt" a lot and she always pronounces all the letters in it. The result is funny. Try it. She said that the best known lei seller in Tahiti, an aristocratic-looking old lady whose face is familiar to every tourist, is named Fifi, and that the tiare Tahiti flowers used in lei-making are grown commercially on Moorea. Aurora said that all her life she has been riding down this eastern shore of her beloved island and she is still rendered breathless "by the many sceneries." She said the missionaries had, no doubt, put too much emphasis on sex, too much effort into trying to fight it. "The missionaries," she said, "they always jump all the way from heaven to below the navel." And then she added a peculiar observation: "Life is too short for sex. In Tahiti it is not important. It is just like to drink a cup of coffee."

I noted again that Aurora, in common with other women of Tahiti, uses the Grandmother Clincher in discussing anything about Tahitian history and folklore. She and the other women will sometimes challenge a historical fact, dating back as far as Wallis and Bougainville, with the forthright statement: "I ought to know what is true and what is not true in this matter. My grandmother was there, and when I was a little girl she told me . . ."

The prevalence of corrugated iron roofs throughout Tahiti, and especially in Papeete, has been bothering me for some time and now Aurora came up with the answer. She said that Papeete's roofs were of wooden shingles until the 1880s when a great fire destroyed many buildings in the town. The fire spread swiftly because of the dry roofing and the people were now afraid of shingles, and so they began ordering the iron. It was the custom to paint the iron with red lead, and this gave it the coloration of red Spanish tile. People tell me that it is the worst kind of roofing material for the tropics, that living under that iron cover is like living in an oven. Yet it is still being brought in and used on new housing. It is too bad that Hank Ketcham didn't assist me in capturing the island and seizing the government. One of my first decrees would have been an order to remove all iron roofing and replace it with genuine tile.

After crossing the isthmus to Little Tahiti we took the road to the village of Tautira. Today it was as rough and bumpy as it was when Robert Louis Stevenson, thought to be dying, was transported over it to Tautira in an old Chinaman's wagon.

Tautira was once described by Leeteg as the most beautiful settlement in the South Seas. Stevenson thought it was a beautiful village. We couldn't see anything extraordinary about it. We saw only a few shabby houses along the main road but I imagine there were quite a few others stuck back in the jungle. The name of Tony Bambridge pops into view on every side, for Tony not only owns a lot of property here, he is famous as the economic savior of the village.

One of his homes is here, facing the main road, painted cobalt blue and with a sign over the gate mentioning the name of Robert Louis Stevenson. Nearby is a cobalt blue movie barn, and across the road is the Robert Louis Stevenson Park, a project of Tony A. Bambridge, according to the sign. As of today, it had nothing in it but weeds.

Stevenson came to Tahiti in 1888 aboard the yacht *Casco*. He had been assigned by an American newspaper syndicate to write a series of South Sea letters. He tried Papeete for a couple of weeks but the climate didn't agree with him and he took sick. He sailed for the southern end of the island, and went ashore at Taravao, where his illness became critical. Someone said that the climate of Tautira was much better and so the sick man was carted to that village. He was lying near death in a native hut when a big Tahitian woman, a Princess with the splendid name of Moe, walked in with a serving of raw fish. This was fed to Stevenson and he began to regain his strength. He was so pleased that he wrote a poem to Princess Moe. It is my guess that the raw fish had coconut cream on it, and that the cream did the trick. Stevenson stayed on in Tautira about two months and then traveled on to Hawaii.

After we had wandered around the village for a while and taken some refreshment at a little hotel called Chez Pepe we made our way to the site that is known, in translation from the French, as The Big Hole of Tony.

Several years ago when he was planning certain real estate ventures in the area of Tautira, Tony Bambridge was approached by a native witch doctor. This area has always been famous for its native priests and sorcerers and Tony knew it. He paid attention to what the witch doctor told him. This old man said he had had a dream in which the hiding place of a great treasure had been revealed to him. The dream concerned the death and burial of a Spaniard in the neighborhood of the village. Tony Bambridge knew that this meant Captain Boenechea, who led a Spanish expedition out of Peru and died while he was here in 1775. It was known that Captain Boenechea was buried in or near Tautira. The witch doctor told Tony that an immense treasure was put into the grave with the Spaniard *he* had in mind. And in his dream he had been given directions to find the grave, directions which involved a big mango tree. (Bengt Danielsson told me later that it is required by law that a big mango tree be included in every dream ever dreamed by a Tahitian witch doctor.)

It all sounded reasonable to Tony Bambridge and he grew excited and so he started to dig for that treasure. I imagine that in the beginning he tried to keep the thing secret but the operation grew so

big and complicated that before long everyone in Tahiti knew about it.

Tony put all the able-bodied men of the neighborhood to work, and dug a hole twenty yards in diameter. The digging went on for a long time and on pleasant weekends the road to Tautira would be clogged with people coming down from Papeete to see The Big Hole of Tony.

There were many who scoffed at Tony and his treasure, but it was said that many substantial citizens went to him in private and begged for the privilege of investing in the project.

The big hole was dug within sight of the ocean. In time the diggers struck water — they had reached the layer of coral at sea level. Tony had all the best available pumping equipment hauled down from Papeete, set the pumps to going, and told his men to keep digging. He was pumping the water out of the hole and into a stream which flowed across a field to the sea. As fast as the pumps took out the water, more water replaced it. What Tony was doing, people said, was trying to pump out the whole Pacific Ocean. It was pointless to continue, so the great treasure hunt was abandoned.

Today it is possible to drive along the main highway within a few yards of The Big Hole of Tony without ever noticing it — the vines and weeds and other vegetation have taken over. But the people of Tautira say the digging was a great thing for their village, that Tony spent millions of francs on it, and kept their men gainfully employed at something other than fishing for a long time.

February 1

WHILE WE were at Tautira we were probably as close as I'll ever get to the little island of Mehetia, which lies just beyond the eastern horizon. It is the place where Captain Wallis first touched, and it is the place where Jacques Talrich got lonely for women. The story of Jacques Talrich is a tale of the human spirit. It somehow makes me think of Hemingway's famous line, quoted so often to show that he was a great thinker: "Man was not made for defeat."

A little over a year ago a big radio station in Paris held a contest to choose a man to be cast away for thirty days on a desert island. These radio people knew of the universal dream that men have, to get away from it all, to escape from the workaday world. They said they were seeking a man who led an average sort of life and had an average sort of job and who entertained The Dream, who was sick of civilization, weary of his fellow man, eager to find peace and contentment on an uninhabited isle. It was required that the man be unmarried and he would need to be eloquently convincing. More than two thousand Frenchmen made application and were interviewed and in the end Jacques Talrich was chosen. He was thirty-six, an automobile salesman. He said he had always dreamed of getting away and living by himself, possibly on a tropic island, because he felt that all the people around him were selfish and unpleasant and not only that, just plain rotten.

The winner of the contest would be taken to an unnamed island and installed there and it would be required that he last out a period of thirty days. If he made it, then he would be given all kinds of rewards — he would be settled permanently on an island that would be his own, with every kind of equipment that would be needed to make him comfortable.

Having been proclaimed the man most deserving of the test, Jacques Talrich was allowed to fetch along seventy pounds of luggage. He was flown out to Tahiti. Here in Papeete he was given a shotgun and some fishing equipment. He was an eloquent man, for he talked the promoters into letting him have a dog for companionship and they also furnished him with a short-wave radio so his day-by-day story could be passed along to an eager world by the people sponsoring the project. So he was taken down to Tautira and hauled out to the island of Mehetia. There were wild goats and wild pigs on the island, and plenty of fish and fruit, and a few wild chickens so that it was possible to find an occasional egg.

Talrich, the hater of civilization, built himself a little hut and wandered around the island for a while, communicating with the

promoters by short wave. All seemed to be going well until the nineteenth day when he radioed for them to come and get him. He'd had enough. They brought him back to Papeete and at first he said the damn dog had bit him and he was afraid he'd get lockjaw. But further questioning brought out the information that Jacques couldn't take the loneliness. He said he would have been able to make it but for one thing: he missed female companionship.

It is my own opinion that there was some slight little flaw in Jacques Talrich's character. I'm quite sure that I could stay in a dark clothes closet with the door locked for thirty days, and enjoy every minute of it. Without a dog.

February 2

THE RAINY SEASON is really here. It didn't start as early as last year, when M-G-M was here trying to shoot its big movie. In January of last year it rained three weeks without stopping.

There's a tourist ship in port and Nelle was out at the Hotel Tahiti today and found about a hundred trippers sitting around the lobby and the bar. The downpour had them trapped and they were a sorry-looking crowd. One lady was trying to get a bridge game organized but she was having little success — the people were too sullen for card games. Then into the hotel came a middle-aged man, his clothes soaked and dripping and a big grin on his face. He flung out his arms and exclaimed: "This rain! This blessed, beautiful rain! How I love it! I love to look at it and I love the smell of it and I love to feel it heating on my face! Oh, this blessed rain! Folks, this is living!"

He was put down for mad. It soon stood revealed, however, that this unusual character was from Arizona, where a good rain is looked upon as a sort of miracle, and a glorious thing to contemplate. We have traveled some in Arizona and know that the people there would rather look at a gallon of nice clean water than at the Folies Bergère. Nelle says she thinks the tourist authorities here in Tahiti ought to run a special Rainy Season promotion campaign throughout the dry Southwest. She proposes that I write the advertising campaign, telling the people of Arizona and New Mexico and Southern California of the sopping wet pleasures awaiting them in drenched Tahiti dining humid January and drowned February.

February 3

A RUMOR with odious implications was spreading over the town today. Odious, that is, to the permanent residents of this tropic community. The government, it is said, has decided to crack down on the hot-pillow trade at the local hotels. By this I mean the better class hotels. There are two or three fleabags in Papeete where the wharf rats take their sailors for an hour of dalliance. Nobody is going to interfere with these operations. The new government rule, according to the rumor, is that the big tourist hotels are not to engage in the hot-pillow trade any longer. The term hot-pillow trade comes out of the motel business in the United States and has reference to guests who check in, pretending to be husband and wife, and within an hour or two check out. This sort of commerce has been common in Tahiti since the time of Samuel Wallis. It has been publicized around the world. The oldtime missionaries called the island "the filthy Sodom of the South Pacific" and that descriptive line has appealed to thousands of gentlemen travelers down through the years. The filthy Sodom of the South Pacific. Somehow it has a soft and lovely roll to it. The ease with which transactions in sex are accomplished in Tahiti has been described by many writers, and even old Sydney Clark spoke frankly about it in his guidebook. A man picks up a likely *vahine* or a smouldering tourist girl and takes her to a hotel without baggage and checks in and no questions asked and no smirks. That's the way it has always been. Over the years there have been a lot of hot pillows in this town. So now people are sitting around and grumbling against the government. What reason could they possibly have for such an idiotic regulation? Why, god damn it, it's against the Napoleonic Code! Some said that the wowsers among the tourists have been writing complaining letters to the government. Pious travelers have come here and listened and observed and read the guidebooks and then they have written their protests, saying it is a sin against God for such things to be permitted.

The effect on the local sinners has been deep and profound. I sat for a while today and listened to them in their cool analysis of the situation. One gentleman, in from his Punaauia house, smote the table a mighty blow and exclaimed: "Let the god damn tourists go to Scotland and shoot grouse!"

February 4

FROM THE STUDIOS of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Los Angeles has come a small, slick booklet which is a sort of preliminary report, in ultramarine prose, of the filming of the *Mutiny on the Bounty* in Tahiti. I have read it carefully and it impresses me as being a pamphlet written to appease the people of Tahiti more than anything else. It suggests quite strongly, again and again, that the film company did Tahiti a great favor by bringing a hundred and twenty-five well-mannered, conservative Californians to the island and turning them loose in the streets of Papeete. Here is one paragraph:

And when the actors and technicians, their work completed, prepared to depart, the natives who had become so much a part of their lives jammed Papeete's airport to say farewell, and there was more weeping than at any previous time in the island's history.

This may be true. People weep at weddings. I have known people to weep on getting a raise in pay. I have heard of people who, on being notified that they have inherited two million dollars, broke down and bawled like little babies.

I wasn't here, so I must concede that the natives at the airport wept, possibly because they were sorry to see all those M-G-M people leaving. The motivation for the weeping is not for me to determine, nor is it for M-G-M to determine. The one big fact remains: M-G-M had the entire island in an uproar for many months. When all those actors and all those technicians climbed aboard their planes and flew off to Hollywood, they left behind them a lot of scars. They left, also, about two million dollars. This is the sum they are said to have spent during their stay in Tahiti, and it represents about one-tenth of the over-all cost of the picture.

M-G-M spent nine months on the island — a provocative sort of time-spread. A lot of the activity took place at Point Venus, but there doesn't seem to be a trace of it left. We have been out there half a dozen times during our stay, and have never seen any indication that a big movie production company had been swarming over the point a few months back. The native village, built by the film people, has vanished. There remain those noble edifices which have become major Tahitian landmarks, always pointed out proudly to the tourists:

“Yonder’s the house where Marlon Brando lived.” There must be a dozen of them.

There remains, also, the running argument about Brando’s leading lady, a native girl called Tarita. Was she, or was she not, washing dishes at Les Tropiques at the time she was discovered? There are three schools of thought on this weighty proposition. One group says that Tarita was, beyond shadow of a doubt, a washer of dishes, a scullery hand. Another says she was a waitress and only *helped out* with the washing of dishes. And a third says that she was never a menial but an artist, a navel-jerker in the hotel’s floor show. She is at present living in Hollywood and it is said that she is still Brando’s leading lady, otherwise I would seek her out and try to get the straight of the dishwashing matter. I have probed around among people who know her and as near as I can make out the following facts are true, or close to truth.

Tarita grew up in a country district of Bora Bora. Being more shapely and more beautiful than most Polynesian girls, she eventually made her way to the fleshpots of Papeete. She fell in with a young man, a Dane, who was working as a cook at Les Tropiques. She became this Dane’s girl friend and through him got work at the same hotel. One day Frank Silvera, an M-G-M actor, spotted Tarita washing dishes or waiting table or dancing at Les Tropiques. He knew the producers were desperate for a *vahine* to play opposite Brando. So Mr. Silvera rushed right down to headquarters in the Grand Hotel with news of his discovery. Squadrons of experts on sexuality went Dauphining westward on the Broom Road. Miss Tarita was seized upon and inspected as if she were a fat goose in the Farmers Market. They took sightings and soundings and fingered her fore and aft; they patted her bottom and found it adequate; they gave her chest a dry-run and said okey-doke. Her teeth? Teeth never amount to a damn in Hollywood, one way or another. No matter what kind of teeth you’ve got, once you’re tapped for pictures you get a new set automatically. It didn’t take them long to decide that this was their baby. They were congratulating themselves on her discovery when a darkling cloud came up from the west: the Danish cook. He started making demands. If M-G-M was going to snatch his personal *vahine* away from him, M-G-M could get it on the line. Nobody knows what sort of a settlement was effected, except that the Dane was put on the payroll and assigned the job of preparing box lunches that were used by the company when it was on location. Some people say that Scandinavian collected the largest salary in the whole history of the box lunch. Eventually, however, he faded from view and no one seems to know where he went. One insignificant Dane, accustomed to working with tuna fish sandwiches, is not much of a match

when pitted against the might of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. In any case, it has always been made clear that Tarita was never actually married to him — except in The Tahitian Way.

There is yet another case in which the M-G-M juggernaut ran over and mangled romance. Living in Papeete was a French writer, correspondent for a big newspaper back in Paris. He had a lovely *vahine*. It must be remembered that more than seven thousand natives were in the employ of the film company at one time or another and so this Frenchman's tan doxy, being more than passing fair, was grabbed up by the casting people. The Frenchman was furious. His *vahine* had been taken away from him and hauled out to location encampments and was being paid so well that she would be getting a big head, and wanting to go to Hollywood to become another Dale Evans. Moreover, she was being thrown into the daily company of *popaa* gentlemen with suave West Los Angeles manners and little mustaches — technicians with techniques. The French journalist demanded that his *vahine* be returned to him instantler. The M-G-M people advised him to go soak his head. He spurned this pleasant injunction and instead went shopping. He bought a huge beach umbrella, fabricated in splashy colors. He waited until the movie company was all set up for the magnificent scene in which the *Bounty* arrived in Matavai Bay. Then he raised his gaudy umbrella on the beach, in full view of the Ultra Panavision cameras, and stretched himself out in its shade. There were shrieks of agony mixed in with threats to kill, but the Frenchman remained calm, and pointed out that under the law the beach belongs to everyone, and suggested that M-G-M go find a location in New Guinea. He was given sixteen thousand francs heart balm, plus the return of his *vahine*. I have heard that the girl was so sore at him for terminating her film career that she left him for good.

February 5

IT IS a great disappointment to us that we have not had a chance to look upon the *Bounty*. I mean the one built for the new M-G-M picture. We've seen several pictures of her and she is a beauty. The ship is slightly larger than the original but follows her specifications in all other details — save, of course, for the fact that she is diesel-powered. She was built in Nova Scotia from copies of the original blueprints furnished by the British Admiralty and she cost something around \$750,000. She is now in Southern California waters and I have heard a report that she may be converted into a cruise ship, operating along the California coast. It seems a shame that Tahiti cannot have her on a permanent basis, for inter-island cruising. This would be a real tourist attraction, and Tahiti needs one. The average tourist wants no more than a couple of hours of scenery, then he's got to have some action. But moving the *Bounty* to Tahiti would be too costly. Even the government couldn't swing it. Let us keep in mind that the total money spent on production of the new picture would pay for the governing of French Polynesia for more than six years.

It seems strange that people around Tahiti know so little about the original *Bounty*. All of them have read the Nordhoff-Hall books, but few remember what was in them. The original name of the ship, for example, was *Bethia*. Try to find somebody on this island who knows it. The name was changed to *Bounty* at the suggestion of Sir Joseph Banks. A very canny man. He must have foreseen that a best-selling book and some high-class movies would eventually be turned out, dealing with the ship and its people, and so he rechristened it. *Mutiny on the Bethia* just doesn't seem to have the right rhythm, the right ring.

During the rainy season in Tahiti there are two things to do. Well, three. But I'll speak only of two. Sit home and drink, or sit home and read. I have, for the most part, been doing the latter. And I've come up with several things about the *Bounty* that seem worth recounting here.

Bligh was surely the ultimate in traditional British doggedness. They sent him out to Tahiti to get breadfruit and to transport it to the West Indies. The English planters and merchants of the Caribbean islands had slaves, and it was thought that breadfruit would make an admirable and economical diet for them. It took Captain Bligh six long years, including the mutiny, including that harrowing voyage in the small boat, and including later difficulties in Tahiti, but by god he delivered the goods. In the end he arrived in the West Indies with the

Tahitian breadfruit plants — 2126 of them, to be exact. So what happened? The Negro slaves of the Caribbean, for whom the good captain had been busting his butt all those years, turned up their nose at the breadfruit. They didn't like the taste of it and they refused to eat it. It seems to me that somebody might have tried the stuff out on them before going to all that bother. But nobody did, and so the tradition of *Bounty* extravagance and *Bounty* wastefulness was established long before Brando and company arrived in Papeete.

There is a strange, vague notion among the people of Tahiti that the *Bounty* story belongs to the Halls and the Nordhoffs, that Hall and Nordhoff made it all up. As an evidence of this feeling, I would like to speak of a small activity of mine in recent days. I have been going around town asking people to tell me who played in the *first* movie version of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. They all say, of course, Laughton and Gable. Then I say, "But didn't Errol Flynn make the picture before Laughton and Gable?" Most of them laugh at me. Ridiculous! Never heard of such a thing! Preposterous! Impossible! You writin' guys come out here and spend a couple weeks hangin' around a bar and then you know everything there is to know.

Well, Errol Flynn played the part of Fletcher Christian in a motion picture titled *In the Wake of the Bounty*. The picture was, in reality, a sort of documentary describing life on Pitcairn Island as it was about 1930. In a prologue, the mutiny itself was dramatized and Flynn was Fletcher Christian. It was his first movie and it was produced by an Australian company. Subsequently M-G-M bought up the film in order to clear the way for its own Laughton-Gable production. *In the Wake of the Bounty* now reposes somewhere in the M-G-M vaults.

February 5

RAIN. In solid sheets. By the bucketful.

February 6

RAIN. Continual and constant.

February 7

RAIN. Night and day. I find it expedient, much to my surprise, to quote a missionary. It was Mr. Maugham's Reverend Davidson who said at Pago Pago: "In the wet season you can't afford to pay any attention to the rain." Here in Papeete it has been coming down steadily but the people simply put their raincoats on backwards, climb on their motor bikes and their scooters, lower their heads and go happily about their normal affairs. There is really no cessation of activity, except perhaps in our household. The rain doesn't irritate us — we find it fascinating. I remember seeing a silent motion picture when I was a child which starred Lon Chaney and which was laid in the deep tropics. From the moment the picture began until it ended the rain poured down. Out of that movie, and out of Maugham's short story, the rain has become as much a part of the traditional South Sea picture as the coconut palm and sweat. We sit in the house with the windows swung wide and look at it, and listen to it. Sometimes we put on our swimming clothes and go out and walk around in it.

We don't stay home all the time. We went out to the Hotel Tahiti before noon today and were sitting around tourist watching when I observed an old man, an American in a gaudy Hawaiian shirt, thumping along toward the bar. The bartender is a native girl and the old man came up to her and leaned himself against the bar and said, "I'd like a blackberry cordial, miss." This bar is a hangout for some of the leading drinkers of the South Pacific, and a gathering place for Tahiti's most talented guzzlers. They are accustomed to surprise, accident, misunderstanding, and even such an incident as was provided a few weeks back when the lady showed her left tit to the populace.

I was close enough to hear all the conversation. The girl back of the bar asked the old man to repeat what he had said. He said he would like to have a blackberry cordial. This was a thing outside her experience. She repeated it a few times, and called over a couple of waitresses, and discussed it with them. They spoke of blacky coral and bagglebee cudgel and other variations on a theme. Finally they decided that the problem could be solved by simply telling the old man they didn't have any blagbelly coddle. This didn't satisfy him. He marched around to the end of the bar, lifted the barrier and walked in behind it. Then he and the girl bartender began a diligent search of the shelves. They moved patiently from bottle to bottle, and when they failed to find any brackwerry cogswell the old man put a finger to his cheek and gazed around and then started searching the area beneath the bar. He opened everything in sight,

picking up pitchers of lime juice and sniffing at them, and dropping bar tools on the floor. Nobody seemed to mind. One of the waitresses had been sent to get assistance from the other side of the building, and Pierre, a French waiter captain, arrived on the double. Now they went over the problem again, but Pierre knew nothing about bocksneery clobber. More people arrived from the front desk, and from the kitchen, and the thing began to take on the flavor of an international conference at Geneva. They never did find any blackberry cordial and a bit later I saw the old man at a table in the dining room having lunch with a bottle of Hinano on the side.

A rainy day is a good time, too, to loll around Bar Vaima and we spent an hour or two there this afternoon. A group of us got to talking about Tony Bambridge.

"He's a tough old bird," someone said. "His mother was a Gilbert Islander. Do you know about Gilbert Islanders?"

"Can't say that I do," I replied.

"They are ear-biters."

"Ear-biters?" I repeated.

"Yeh. A Gilbert Islander takes a dislike to you, he'll run up to you and bite your ear. Bite it clear off if you don't belt him one."

Geography is one of my favorite subjects.

Arriving home, I turned in at our driveway and immediately became aware of activity in the deep ditch which runs alongside the highway. I looked down and it was Onna. The ditch is a well-made one, perhaps four or five feet deep, walled with stone. Onna was down in it, in the pouring rain, cleaning out the thick growth of vegetation. She was wearing as little as possible, and the sweat and the rainwater was rolling off of her and as she grinned up at me I noticed that she wore a lovely tiare Tahiti flower in her black hair. Over a period of a year or so that ditch gets choked with vegetation and cleaning it out is clearly a job for a man with a strong back. But Onna was in there making those weeds and vines fly. She had cleaned the ditch all the way from the western end of the property, a distance of a hundred or more feet, and she was almost finished with a job that would have taken me two weeks and put me in traction. A glimmering of an idea came into my mind as I watched her. I may speak of it later.

February 8

RAIN. Incessant.

February 9

RAIN.

I have been checking back on the story of the Tahitian boy named Omai. At about the time of the American Revolution he was a young man in his early twenties, handsome, well put together and apparently possessed of a pleasing personality.

It was a custom among the early explorers who visited the South Seas to pick out a likely native and take him back to Europe, usually England. There the people would have a chance to commune with a true savage, and even talk to him, and this was a more wondrous experience than looking at a giraffe or an orang-outang. From what I have read there must have been periods in London when savages from the Pacific islands were trampling one another, they were that numerous. Omai, of Tahiti, was one of the most famous of these. He spent two years in England and was somewhat more than a sensation. He was taken to England in 1774 aboard the *Adventure*. On the ship Omai was placed in the custody of Lieutenant James Burney, a brother of Fanny Burney, a celebrated English novelist of the period. It was Lieutenant Burney's job to instruct Omai in English and in table manners and in other critical things he would need to know in his brush with the culture of England.

Omai was taken to the opera, to the theater, to country houses, to sporting events, and apparently he had been well-trained because his manners were exemplary, if slightly off-beat. Tahitians, to this day, are not bashful; I can't remember meeting a single native who suffers from lack of assurance. Omai was completely self-possessed, always himself in the many social contacts he made in England. When he was presented to George III he bowed and said, "How do, King Tosh." Having dinner at the Burney house, he tasted the roast beef and commented, "Very dood, very dood." At a garden party in the country a lady asked him what he liked best in London and he replied: "The great hog that carries people. English hogs very fine. Lord and Lady Sandwich show me a great hog that gives coconut milk. Very dood. No climb trees — only put hand under and squeeze." Present at this same party was one of England's reigning beauties, Lady Carew. Someone asked Omai what he thought of her. "Very nice, not very nasty," he said. A titled gentleman came up to the Tahitian and offered him a pinch of snuff. "No tank you sir," said Omai. "Me nose be no hungry."

The thought has come to me that I am somewhat in the tradition of the great explorers. I am here to investigate the habits and the customs of the Tahitian people. It is my aim to tell the people back

home how it is in Tahiti. If I followed the lead of those who have preceded me, I might very well choose a native to take back to Mount Kisco with me. It was this notion that crossed my mind a couple of days ago when I saw Onna working in the ditch. In Westchester County we have a house set on four acres of land. There is a lot of hard work connected with its upkeep. Onna has shown us that she can work as well outdoors as in. It seems a strange thing that Onna, the creature sweating in the ditch, could be the same person who arranges the flowers so tastefully in our living room. A few days ago an electrical storm split a big limb in the towering avocado tree beside Louise's house. The rain was still falling when Onna mounted into the tree, climbing halfway up and then attacking the split branch with her machete — a fearsome weapon she always carries with her. It was a job calling for a saw, or an axe, but Onna used her machete to cut that limb off as cleanly as if it had been done with a razor. There was another day recently when something went wrong with the gas stove in our kitchen. It is fed from a small tank which is positioned under the sink. We phoned Louise at her office and she said to tell Onna. We sent Miri into the fields with a message for Onna. She came running. She went to Louise's house and then came across the lawn carrying an assortment of large pipe wrenches and hammers. She got down on the floor in the kitchen and went to work. In the end she fetched a fresh tank of gas. It weighed as much as Eddie Arcaro but she toted it across the yard and, grunting and groaning, soon had it installed. Then she grinned like a mule eating briars, fixed a fresh blossom in her hair, picked up her machete and returned to the fields.

If I decided to take a savage back to Mount Kisco, it would be Onna. The primary aim, of course, would be scientific, ethnological. I would share her with the nation's anthropologists. Oh, the hell I would! My purpose would not be to show her off to the natives of Westchester. Not to exhibit her at country homes. Not to walk her around the halls of the *Reader's Digest* or the IBM place or Ravetto's Restaurant or Stanley Halle's mansion. I'd take her back and her machete with her. She could keep my fields down, and the woods clean, and the ditches clear. And Nelle said: "Lord, how I'd like to turn her loose a couple of times a week in that house."

It is a pleasant thing to think about. It seems to me that we spend about half our time back home trying to find somebody to do the hard work that needs to be done around the place; the other half of the time we spend doing the hard work ourselves. Onna could be the answer. Or could she? I seem to remember that Omai was spoiled rotten by his two years in London. When Captain Cook brought him back to Tahiti, it was thought that Omai would be received as a sort of hero, that his friends and relatives would swarm around him

admiringly and ask him to tell them about his adventures in the faraway places. It didn't happen that way. It didn't happen because Omai was very la-di-da when he got back, and looked down his nose at the Tahitians. So Captain Cook decided not to leave him in Tahiti at all, but took him over to the island of Huahine and built a house for him there and told him that if he was smart he would stay away from the Tahitians, for they might take a coral knife and split him right down the middle and make London broil.

I have no idea what might happen to Onna if she were exposed to the cafe society mob in New York. I would try to keep her away from the likes of Dorothy Kilgallen and Toots Shor and Truman Capote and the rat pack of Harry's Palace Bar & Grill. I wouldn't want to scar this simple Austral Islander for life.

February 10

RAIN. We tried it out through Punaauia today and made it as far as Bengt Danielsson's place. We sat down with tall glasses of cold seetrone, made from the marvelous limes that grow in great abundance everywhere in Tahiti, and Bengt talked about the *moe-totolo*, or night-creepers. These are native boys who are ugly and unattractive to the girls and have difficulty arranging assignations. These boys have strong appetites, nonetheless, and so they have worked out a technique for satisfying them. They make it their business to find out when a boy has a date to sneak into his girl friend's house in the middle of the night for the purpose of working his will with her. The night-creeper then creeps. He greases his body with coconut oil to make himself slippery in case the girl's folks catch him at his creeping. Then he goes to the girl's house a little before the hour she is expecting her true love. The night-creeper creeps in and keeps his mouth shut except for a few grunts and makes loves to the girl. She never knows the difference. That's what Anthropology says.

February 11

RAIN. Much thunder, which is unusual. More rain.

In the classical literature of Tahiti, if such it can be called, the names of people are usually given in Tahitian and then in English translation. Among the Polynesian characters I have come across in the books are:

Tupu Heiva (Begin play).

Tautu Maau (Domesticated imbecile).

Ida (Torn off).

Teihotu (Erect nose).

Teponuiireihana (The-great-night-of-stiff-neck).

Tevaruamanavaura (Spirit-with-red-intestines).

Kohekapu (Seat-cut-off).

February 12

RAIN.

As is our habit in this wet weather we wandered around the premises of the Hotel Tahiti today talking to travelers. Among these were the Arsenaults from Pennsylvania. They were stooled up at the bar, complaining bitterly at the weather because it has fouled up their plans. They want to organize an expedition to Lake Vaihiria and capture a Giant Eel. Getting to Lake Vaihiria is about as difficult a proposition as you could lay out for yourself in Tahiti. You start from Baldwin Bambridge's district of Mataiea and strike inland along the Vaihiria River. It is jungle all the way, very probably quite beautiful but also fetid and sweaty and stinking and aswarm with clouds of voracious mosquitoes. Lake Vaihiria itself is about fifteen hundred feet above sea level, which means that you've got to walk uphill to get to it. I have talked to people who have been there. You don't walk uphill in a straight line — the jungle makes it necessary to zigzag. You've got to have native guides with machetes to chop away some of the dense growth. A good part of the time you are sliding and slithering around in mud, often up to your knees. After two long days of this, you arrive at the lake. It is a mere six miles from the coast but it requires two days to reach it provided you are strong and adjusted and well-vaccinated. People are attracted to Lake Vaihiria, they say, by the legend that its waters are inhabited by eels as big as men, eels that have big ears on the sides of their heads. The physical proportions of the Vaihiria eels have been exaggerated. There are big eels in the lake, but they are about the size of a man's leg, not a whole man. And their ears are nothing more than cauliflowered fins.

What else is there to see and do at Lake Vaihiria? Nothing. Nothing but sweat one minute and shiver the next and bat mosquitoes and claw through the mud and acquire multiple welts and scratches and knots on your head. Yet the Arsenaults are deeply disheartened that their trip to this fairyland has been delayed.

"We are not leaving this island," said Mr. Arsenault, who is an auto dealer, "until we see that lake."

I told him and his wife that I had heard descriptions of the trip, about the mud and the suffocating heat and the cold and the ever-upward course and the mosquitoes and how it's necessary to ford the river a hundred times on the way up. As I talked these Pennsylvania people seemed to take on a glow.

I was giving them a picture of a true paradise. The more dramatic I made the horrors of the trip sound, the more eager they became to get going. They were quite definitely of the school which holds travel to

be aimless and without merit unless there is hardship and acute suffering and danger to life connected with it. In recent years Nelle and I have encountered many such people traveling in foreign lands. They are the ones who yearn to penetrate to out-of-the-way places. The beaten track is not for them. They are happiest where the food is ghastly, the accommodations primitive, the snakes venomous and the natives unfriendly. They despise a toilet that works and would enjoy arriving home with the malarial whim-whams. The Arsenaults really don't care about those big eels in Lake Vaihiria. They want to make that miserable, backbreaking trip because very few other people in all history have ever made it. They have a mission in life — to suffer and bleed. And then talk about it afterward. I might add that they are held in much higher esteem back home than those of us who have no desire to beard a Giant Eel in his native bog. We should try, always, to be tolerant of the other fellow's whims. Samuel Butler knew a wealthy drunkard who refused to give money to the poor. He said they would only use it to buy food and clothes for themselves and send their children to school.

February 14

A VALENTINE for Rupert Brooke.

The English poet came to Tahiti in 1914 and lived in a house in the Giant Eel district of Mataiea. He was then twenty-five years old and came to the island to look for lost paintings of Gauguin. He never found any, but he went native and wrote home that Tahiti was the best place in all the world to work and live. He took to wearing nothing but a strip of pareu doth around his middle. The chronicles of the time say that his back became painfully sunburned and so he persuaded a beautiful native girl to sit beside him for hours, anointing him gently with vinegar and coconut oil. During these proceedings “it was difficult to get him to sit still.” Well, I should think so.

This Rupert Brooke died during World War I after writing a famous poem called *The Soldier*. It is a very nice poem, and stirs the gizzards of sentimental Englishmen. I would like to point out, however, that this same Rupert Brooke composed the following line: “Somewhere an ukulele thrills and cries.” On the strength of that one line I venture the opinion that he knew nothing whatever about the ukulele, and very little about the writing trade.

February 15

I HAVE BEEN reading *Mystic Isles of the South Seas* by Frederick O'Brien. I have been reading it and enjoying it and profiting from it and the very fact of my having it in my house has set me to thinking. Strangely, I have been thinking about Thomas Wolfe. In another book I have told how I became slightly involved in the Wolfe story when the big Carolina boy burst upon the American literary scene. His early novels were acclaimed by the Higher Criticism as works of genius, and I gobbled them down and went along with the shouts and huzzahs of the country's top literary umpires. I have now decided that I was probably wrong. Thomas Wolfe gushed words, as everyone knows, pouring them out in a sort of uncontrolled Niagara. When he finished a novel it was almost necessary for him to use a wheelbarrow to get it to the Scribner offices on Fifth Avenue. Then his famous editor Maxwell Perkins took it in hand and with axe and machete began chopping. Wolfe's work was impossible the way he handed it in. Great chunks of it had to be hewn away and thrown in the ashcan, and the remainder had to be rejiggered and reorganized and I imagine it took Perkins as long to do his part as it took Wolfe to write the original. Everybody knows about this. I have known it almost from the beginning. And now, by way of a peculiar route, I've arrived at an opinion. Thomas Wolfe was a lousy writer. An extremely important and basic quality in the work of any writer is self-discipline. It is just as important for him to know how to hold back as it is for him to know how to put down. If he has no control over his prose, and simply lets it pour down the mountainside like an avalanche, then he ought to be in some other trade. A carpenter, building a house, wouldn't last long if he functioned under Wolfe's system — adding on big, ugly, cockeyed wings and misshapen chunks of house that someone else would have to chop off later.

By this same rule of perverse reasoning, I have now become a fan of Frederick O'Brien where, in past years, I have read no more than bits and fragments of his work. He has never rated with the Higher Criticism, and I have let the Higher Criticism keep me away from him. Among the high-toned literary satraps one doesn't even bring up the name of Frederick O'Brien. He's a jock-strapped Kathleen Norris. But now I have read *Mystic Isles of the South Seas* and I say this: *it is the best god damned book ever written about Tahiti.*

O'Brien was here in 1914, at the same time as Rupert Brooke, and stayed a long while. He saw everything and understood everything and he put the island on paper exactly as it was. I feel quite sure of this; there is enough of the old flavor of Tahiti left today to tell me

that O'Brien had it right. His book is packed with good information about the natives and their ways, about the history of the island, about the beachcombers and the occasional tourists and the vagrant shipping men and the Chinese storekeepers and the feel and smell of the place. But for the circumstance that Ripley Gooding came and dumped an armload of books into my living room I probably would never have looked at this volume. Yet it has given me a greater understanding of Tahiti than anything else I've read. This is all the more remarkable when we consider the fact that O'Brien was writing in our own Victorian age, that he was contemporaneous with Harold Bell Wright (the two of them hogged the best-seller lists around 1919).

Thus it came as a great and delightful surprise to me to find that this Frederick O'Brien was a thoroughly civilized man. It came as a pleasurable shock to find him writing a chapter, nearly fifty years ago, justifying the Arioi Society of Tahiti — the upper-class natives who believed that sex was for fun and smothered all their babies at birth. It was a further edifying shock to find this almost prehistoric gentleman voicing contempt for the missionaries and their work in Tahiti — in fact, an eloquent contempt for the Christian ethic in its entirety as applied to the natives of Polynesia.

With all this, O'Brien was a man who had a nice eye for the Tahitian girls, and it is worth noting that the *vahines* of his time had good teeth. He wrote of how "their passionate charm . . . the tawny skin, pearly teeth, and the superb form of the pure Tahitian, left little to be desired in fetching and saucy allurements . . . with their sinuous, golden bodies so sensualized, so passionate, and so free." This, I think, was what Fritz Loewe had in mind when he arrived in Papeete last month; I wouldn't object to a little bit of it myself.

Back in 1914 O'Brien reported the existence of nearly forty automobiles on the island — a frightful state of affairs. More than a man's life was worth just trying to cross the road. And there were a dozen big cars, of the limousine type, that were hired out to sailors and tourists and were forever roaring around town in the middle of the night — sometimes as late as eleven o'clock — with their occupants singing and playing accordions and generally acting the fool. I just wish Frederick could see the traffic today. The famous British racing driver Stirling Moss was visiting Tahiti a few months ago and Charles Petras, the newspaperman, talked with him. He asked Moss what he considered to be the greatest adventure of his life, the one single feat that gave him the greatest emotional wallop. Said Moss: "No question about it. Riding, at high noon, from one side of Papeete to the other on a Vespa."

O'Brien was acute in his observations of the Tahitian Chinese. He recognized that they have a keen but peculiar sense of humor. He

wrote: "They see a thousand funny things about them, and laugh inwardly; but they never see anything amusing in themselves. The individual man conceives himself a dignified figure in a world of burlesque." In this, of course, the Chinese differ sharply from the native Tahitians. To them everything is funny, including themselves, and including especially all minor tragedies. The man chasing his hat, the man slipping on the banana peel (in Tahiti he slips on an overripe mango) is funnier here than elsewhere. I have heard that on the launches running between Papeete and Moorea, where seasickness is the rule, two Tahitians will stand at the rail, throwing up like crazy, and when they are not heaving they will be howling with laughter at themselves and at their friends.

February 16

THERE IS a newspaperman named Count Marco in town from San Francisco. He is a real kay-rackter. He writes a column of advice to women, and he is here for two days, photographing native girls and trying to find out if they know something that American ladies ought to know. Count Marco is a dressy, lively fellow, and moves fast. Yesterday I ran into him every time I came around a corner. Then last night we decided to have another look at the Lafayette, the late drinking-and-dancing spot. We were at the Hotel Tahiti where we had fallen in with an old lady schoolteacher who is traveling alone. This old lady had led a prim and proper life for all of her years in a small Midwestern town and I had a feeling that, just for once, she would like to cut the strings and let down her hair and holler for joy. So we took her out to Lafayette, after having first ladled a firkin or so of whiskey into her. She was a caution and I was so pleased over the way she was enjoying herself that I took leave of my senses and danced with her. I was clumping around the crowded floor when a Comanche shriek sounded in my ear. I turned and it was Count Marco, a crown of white flowers askew on his head, a wild San Francisco look in his eye, and a handsome *vahine* in his arms. It is my guess that Count Marco got more value out of two days in Tahiti than most people get in a year.

This morning I found watermelon seeds stuck all over my little Dauphine. They had been spit there by inconsiderate revelers at Lafayette last night.

Also this morning I got my first telephone call from the United States. It was exciting. The Tahiti operator made a big emotional federal case out of it, even though trans-Pacific calls are common. She would yell at me in French, and then she would cry, "Ockland! Ockland! *Vraiment!* Ockland!" I thought that it was somebody in Auckland but it turned out that she was trying to get an operator in Oakland. The caller proved to be our old friend Gene Austin, who was in Dallas filling a night dub engagement. He hadn't known we were in the South Pacific and last night he tried to get me on the phone at my house in New York. Temporarily disconnected. He then called mutual friends in various parts of the United States. "I said to myself," he yelled at me across the broad Pacific, "I said, I'm gonna locate that son of a bitch if it's the last thing I do on this earth. Great God, I didn't know it would take me clean to Tahiti."

"So," I said, "what's on your mind?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all. Just wanted to say hello."

I think maybe he had been drinking some of that Texas telephone

whiskey.

February 17

TODAY I finally got our radio antenna repaired. About a week ago I went into a Chinese store downtown and asked about a repairman. They said they would send one immediately. Saffa noon. He arrived today, a teen-age Tahitian boy on a bicycle. He walked into the house and looked at the big hi-fi machine and then asked me if I had some adhesive tape and a knife. That boy had come all the way out to Maison Louise without a single tool. He depends on the resources of his customers for such things. I located some tape and gave him my pocketknife and found a screwdriver and he went to work. The fact that he goes about his job with no more equipment than a bicycle so fascinated me that I stood by and watched him work. He was a real pro. I had a feeling that he could have done the whole job with his thumbs and his teeth.

This being Saturday, we had the pleasure of attending another of Ripley Gooding's rum-punch lunches. Ripley lives in a small thatched house, unpretentious for a man of his standing in the community. He pointed out his former residence, a much bigger place which stands next door. "That was my home," he said, "but along came M-G-M and they wanted every big house on the island and they wanted to rent mine and I said no and they said fifteen hundred American dollars a month and I said somebody around here is crazy and it's not Ripley Gooding. I rented it to them and they moved in five guys, five technicians, and I didn't sleep for months because of the noise they made all night. They had that house full of *vahines* and they kept the music going till the sun came up and *dance!* I'm telling you for a fact, those people danced right through the floor. Broke the boards and then kept right on dancing and kicked the rest to splinters. I didn't make one single complaint. I just sat around and counted the money."

This time Ripley put on a real feed, featuring native mahi-mahi and suckling pig. Another couple came, the people who own the Bel Air Hotel up the highway toward town, the wife being an American. Ripley had about six rum punches and he was in excellent fettle. After the dinner we sat around and Dorothea put some records on the machine — they all seemed to be songs of the 1920s. As each number began Ripley would tilt his big head back and half close his eyes and say, "Ah, that song, it makes me think of a little lady I was going around with back in..... This is a habit with him. It might be a song, it might be an anecdote, but many things remind him of a little lady he was going around with at the time. I judge that during his life he has gone around with a good many.

The lady from the Bel Air Hotel said something about the trouble

everyone has with the humidity in Tahiti, and her husband spoke up and said, "But don't forget about dandruff." "Oh, yes," said the lady. "This humid climate may be rough on a lot of things but it's wonderful for the skin. You don't get that crispness at the elbows, and there is no such thing as dandruff out here. If you have been subject to dandruff in the past, it vanishes as soon as you arrive in Tahiti. And when you go back to the States, you get it all over again — usually worse than before."

I am inclined to suffer from mild attacks of dandruff but it now occurred to me that I have had none in Tahiti. Being a man with a Madison Avenue approach to life, I suggested at once that Tahiti should advertise in the States:

A SURE CURE FOR DANDRUFF!
COME TO GOLDEN TAHITI!

And this talk of the humidity brought another of its benefits to mind. The damp climate is wonderful for typewriter ribbons. They retain their moisture until they are in shreds. When I left home the ribbon in my portable needed replacement, but I was in a hurry and didn't get it done. Out here it came quickly to life, and I have written half a dozen magazine articles, plus all my correspondence, and mountains of notes, and I still haven't changed it. Come to Tahiti and save on typewriter ribbons! While curing yourself of dandruff!

February 18

WE WERE driving in to town today with Aurora when a colorful pedestrian hove in view. He was big and heavy with a brown Tahitian face and he was wearing a bright red Laredo-type Western hat. Lettered across the crown of the hat were the words ZORRO JACK.

"It is Mathieu!" cried Aurora. "Stop one moment and we will talk to him!"

Mathieu is a town character who is Emile Gauguin's stable-mate. By this I mean they live in the same stable — a crude, dirt-floored room back of the Oceanic garage on Rue Jeanne d'Arc. Mathieu is — well, let us say he is not a deep or impressive thinker.

Aurora greeted him and asked him about Emile. Mathieu said that Gauguin is now out of jail, and back making fish traps on the sidewalk in front of the garage. He said that he likes Emile, that Emile is good to him and gives him food and sometimes even cooks things for him in their sleeping quarters. But, said Mathieu, Emile does bad things too. He steals, and has been known to grab purses from unsuspecting women, and he even walks up to women on the street and tells them he would like to make love to them. That, said Mathieu, is not nice.

Mathieu works a bit from time to time, usually chopping wood, but he is a true Tahitian and if he can get food without labor, he favors that kind of life. He has an unusual hobby. He goes to church every Sunday — he plays no denominational favorites, but switches from one church to another — and memorizes the sermons, including the minister's every gesture, and then he walks the streets and highways repeating those sermons word for word and gesture for gesture, employing the Tahitian tongue. Aurora has observed him doing it and she says that his enunciation is classical, that he is, like most Tahitians, a born orator.

Not long ago Mathieu and Emile got into a loud argument on the sidewalk in front of their dwelling. The question at issue was: which of the two men was the most stupid? The discussion was noisy but completely philosophical in tone. Bystanders said that Mathieu won the debate by delivering the crusher: "You, Emile, are the most stupid because you interest yourself in politics." It was said that Emile hung his massive head and slowly walked away.

Nelle and I already knew that Emile was out of jail. We caught sight of him yesterday on the sidewalk opposite the bank. He was hurrying along with a loaf of bread in one hand and two bottles of beer in the other. He was barefooted and, in fact, in his usual costume — one pair of faded shorts and one wristwatch. Some people say that on account of his blubbery condition he should put on more clothes,

but I am on the side of Emile. His papa wore very skimpy attire in his Tahitian days. Paul Gauguin's usual costume was a blue loincloth, a bright green shirt and a green beret. Emile Gauguin is nowhere near that gaudy.

Aurora told us how yesterday she had gone to call on Onna at her home. The Austral Island girl lives in a big rooming house halfway between our place and town. She has one room and a small terrace and Aurora reports that the room is clean and tastefully furnished. There is a large bed with an elegant spread on it, and off to one side of the room a cot. Onna sleeps on the cot and, as is the case in many native houses, the big bed is mainly for show. The startling news Aurora gave us was that Onna has a photograph of Nelle and me standing on her dressing table. It is the only picture in her room and she couldn't have planned it in advance because Auroras visit was unexpected. I just may by god take that native gal back to Kisco after all.

Aurora's visit was for the purpose of looking into Onna's home life and to arrive at a judgment about whether or not I should interview her. There were a lot of things about her I would like to know and she agreed to answer questions. So this morning she turned up for work dressed like Thousand Franc Colette, her hair done into a big knot on top of her head and her sturdy body encased in a flamboyant pareu. The news that Onna was going to be interviewed spread quickly over the plantation and the other girls started giggling and making remarks of a cutting nature. Young Miri was almost convulsed by Onna's dressy appearance. "Hot baby here! Hot baby here!" Miri kept saying and then she'd roll her eyes and indulge in slinking motions. If I were a girl I don't think I'd poke fun at Onna. Not unless I wanted a tub bath in mercurochrome.

So this afternoon Aurora arrived to serve as interpreter and Onna, finished with her work, retired to freshen herself up and poke some new flowers into her hair. After that she came daintily into our living room, where she is accustomed to wrestling the heavy furniture around, and accepted a limeade. During the whole session she spoke not one word of English. Her complete name is Anautuana Teinauri (Weedy-ditch-here-I-come) and she is about forty years old, though I might have guessed her to be twenty-five. When Onna was seventeen on her native island of Rurutu she got to going around with a boy who was her cousin and his family made such a fuss about it that she decided to leave the Australs. A Chinese supercargo on a copra schooner agreed to give her passage if she'd indenture herself to him as a servant at his house in Tahiti. She worked the required period for him and then met a young man who also came from the Australs, a sailor on a copra ship. They lived together for twenty years. Once he

was able to arrange for her to make the voyage with him on the schooner, traveling as far as Bora Bora and the Tuamotus. Because of this trip Onna is considered by many of her friends to be a widely traveled woman. About four years ago her husband decided he could do better for himself in the New Hebrides. He went to those islands and before he could send for Onna he fell ill of a fever and died. So Onna went to work for Louise.

One thing I wanted to get from Onna was her impression of the United States. It soon became clear that she has only the woolliest notion of what the rest of the world is like. The size and shape of the United States eludes her completely. She goes to the movies occasionally, and she knows about New York, and has seen pictures of the streets, but it is too complex for her to visualize it as a town. Aurora pointed out that many of the Tahitians speak French but they know no more about France than they know about the categorical imperative. Onna's vision of New York and Hollywood and America as a whole is just that — a vision, a sort of wispy, unreal dream. We tried our best to tell her about what it is like where we live. I carefully described snow to her, and how it has to be plowed and shoveled, and how high the drifts get. She didn't understand this at all. Nelle dug out a wintertime picture of our house and pointed to the snow in the driveway. Onna frowned, and asked Aurora to be more explicit about the white stuff. Aurora tried to explain that it was a white rain, soft and floating. Onna was still perplexed. I went to the refrigerator and scraped off some frost and showed it to her and then pointed to the snow in the picture. "Tell her about hail," I said to Aurora, and Aurora told her about hail; she fixed her fingers to indicate hailstones the size of grapes and said the stones were ice and came from the sky. Onna now began grinning her sly grin. It was obvious that we were having her on.

I tried to find out which famous Americans she knew about and liked, but she said she knew none. "Bing Crosby?" I asked. She frowned in thought. No. This was impossible. I have long held the belief that every human being on earth knows about Bing Crosby. I got out a long play record and showed her Bing's picture on the jacket. She shook her head. Didn't know him. Hadn't seen him in the pictures that she could remember. I put the record on the machine. She listened. Hadn't heard him before. I asked her if she liked music at all. She said she did, and that she likes to sing. She goes to church Sundays because she likes the singing part.

"Vye-hee," she said. And Aurora explained that Onna likes Vye-hee music. Now we came upon one real substantial piece of information. The natives of Tahiti and other Polynesian islands consider Hawaii, which they call Vye-hee, to be the grandest place on earth, a sort of

Polynesian heaven. It is the finest place, the most elegant, the most beautiful — it is the island to which they all aspire. Every Tahitian wants to see Vye-hee before he dies. They may not know what it is like in Hollywood or Chicago or New York or Paris or Tokyo. But they knew all about Vye-hee.

Thus our interview with Onna of the Australs. I was a bit disappointed. Whereas Omai, during his stay in London, uttered many quotable funny lines, Onna came out with none. At least Aurora reported nothing comical in any of her responses. Nothing at all to compare with, "How do, King Tosh."

February 19

THIS MORNING I went early to the Bank de l'Indochine for the somewhat painful procedure of getting more money. After all the preliminary negotiations are out of the way, the customer is given a slip of paper with a number on it. He then sits around with a dozen or more other customers waiting for a teller to call out his number — in French. So far as I am concerned, it might as well be called out in Choctaw.

I arrived at the bank five minutes before opening time. There were eight or ten men and women lounging in front of the place, waiting for the doors to open, smoking and chatting and altogether relaxed. I relaxed along with them, leaning against a post and staring at the pageant of the traffic passing in front of me. Suddenly, as if a switch had been thrown, the little crowd of Tahitians came to life — the doors had been opened and I started to stroll inside and those people almost stomped me into the ground. The gentle, undemonstrative, courteous Tahitian, who has no regard for time, is a wild beast when it comes to getting a favored position in line. I finally got my money and then walked up to the magazine store. On the street beyond this store, in the direction of the post office, I saw a big man in shorts and a white T-shirt hurrying along in my direction. For a moment I thought it was Emile Gauguin, but then I changed my mind and stepped into the store. I was looking over the magazines when the same big man walked in. He had some white paper sheets in his hand and he came into the store merely to say, "Bon jour!" to the proprietor, in a most hearty and enthusiastic manner. I saw that it *was* Emile, but he was freshly shaven and that clean T-shirt somehow made him look less blubbery and gave him almost an aspect of dignity. He proceeded merrily on his way and I went out to the sidewalk and watched him. As he headed back for his garage home he stuck his head in several shops, crying out greetings to the businessmen and clerks. Opposite the bank he did a bit of high stepping, where the sidewalk was hot on his bare feet, otherwise he was the soul of respectability.

Two hours later, having finished with a couple of errands, I met Nelle at Bar Vaima where she was sitting with Nancy Rutgers and George Fearons, a chunky young man who runs a travel agency in the town of Stowe, Vermont, and whose love affair with Tahiti is one of the scandals of the South Pacific. Nelle reached into her shopping bag and brought forth a crayon drawing. At first glance I recognized it as a work of superb beauty, with strength and feeling in every line. She said she had been coming along Rue Jeanne d'Arc when she noticed

Emile Gauguin sitting on a wooden crate and working with great concentration over a sheet of drawing paper. He had a box of schoolroom Crayolas and he was lolling his tongue out as he stroked green lines on the paper. He had taken off his T-shirt and was back to his normal costume. Nelle went up to him and looked at the picture. He didn't stop work, but said, "Me Gauguin. Me paint." She tried to talk to him with her faltering French, and then two men came along and stopped to look and they talked to him in French. "Ask him if the American lady Singleton taught him to do this?" Nelle said. Emile nodded vigorously. He said that this was his first "painting" since he had taken the lessons and Nelle said how much and he said one hundred francs and she said good heavens and he said fifty francs. Nelle is a hard woman with a franc, even when buying an original Gauguin, but now she felt ashamed of hammering a sensitive artist so hard, and so out of the essential goodness that is in her she gave him seventy-five. He said that the title of the picture was "The Hotel on Moorea with Flowers Around." He has a knack for titles, as his father had before him.

Early this evening I remarked, while sitting at home, that I am somewhat like the aging male who, sensing a diminution of his masculinity, indulges himself in unnatural bursts of sexual activity. I have heard that there are such men. Here we were, I said, with less than two weeks remaining to us in Tahiti, and we are sitting at home watching the lizards snap at mosquitoes. I knew that a big Dutch tourist ship had just docked and so I suggested that we go down and look at her and at the people she brought to Papeete. So we drove in to town and parked the Dauphine across from Emile Gauguin's garage. Nelle pointed out the box and the barrel that he had used in the production of that splendid picture. I caught a glimpse of his immense body stretched out on the floor back of the barrel. "He's taking a siesta," I said. "Of course," said Nelle. "He's all painted out. After all, this was a big day for him, his first day as a legitimate artist." We went on around to Vaima and sat and watched the sun go down back of Moorea — one of the classical sights of the South Pacific. We looked at the Dutch tourists — a pretty handsome lot as tourists go — and talked for a while with Jimmie Nordhoff about what a remarkable transformation occurs to this little town thirty minutes after a big cruise ship ties up. Then along came Carlos Palacios and his Agnes and we all had a drink together, and talked quite a bit about the new plastic tops on the Bar Vaima tables. After a while we all decided to go out to Maison Louise. Around the corner we found Emile awake and sitting on the curb back of the Dauphine. He recognized Nelle as his first patron and was most polite to her and I told him that I would be downtown again tomorrow and probably buy

another painting. And so we went on out to the house and sat around and had some fine gossips. Then on to Hotel Taaone for pepper steaks and to look at the Papeete Rotary Club in session. I spotted Preston Moore and Bengt and Dave Cave and Dick Frost and several other men I knew. Rotary has become a fairly big proposition on the island. The members look forward with great eagerness to the Monday night meetings and talk about them a lot and I have heard that some of the wives are grumbling and argumentative because their husbands abandon them that one night a week and sometimes come home awash with red wine. The evening was made even more noteworthy for me by the fact that I met and shook hands with the man who raised the colored umbrella on the beach and thus compelled M-G-M to return his *vahine* to him. He was introduced to me as a journalist, correspondent for a Paris newspaper, but to me he will always be the man who raised the colored umbrella against M-G-and-M.

During dinner Carlos said that great changes have come over the Tahitian girls in the ten years since his arrival. "Today," he said, "the *vahines* have organized themselves into an unholy junta. They have a complete dossier on every man who arrives in Tahiti, and somehow they manage to get all the vital information about him before he ever sets foot on the island. They know how much money he has, how many times he has been married if any, how he likes his eggs, what his present marital status is, what he enjoys doing on a rainy day, and they have already decided which girl gets the first crack at him."

Carlos talked about his Chilean origins and his years with the United Nations in New York and how he decided, at fifty-five, to head for Tahiti rather than spend his remaining years chained to a desk. He said that he came to Tahiti with nothing more than the clothes he was wearing. Agnes spoke to him in her native language, reminding him of something. He grinned.

"Agnes says I came with more than my clothes," he said. "So I must be honest and tell you that I had one Rolleiflex camera, a Bell and Howell movie camera and projector, an Ampex push-button tape recorder, a noiseless Remington Rand typewriter, an Edison Voicewriter, thirty thousand feet of film, a Weston density analyzer, a Griswold film splicer, a portable kerosene refrigerator, a shortwave radio, an infrared roaster, a multiplex cooling system, and a cocker spaniel. Otherwise I arrived empty-handed."

February 20

DROVE DOWNTOWN early again and passed the garage and noticed that Emile was asleep on the floor, but his subconscious must have radared the presence of an art connoisseur because we were no more than seated in Bar Vaima when he came hurrying along the sidewalk looking for us. He had his “portfolio” with him — a group of five paintings that he had completed since “The Hotel on Moorea with Flowers Around.” I examined them and thought them inferior, too hurriedly done. I looked at the artist and realized that yesterday’s sale had actually been a bad thing for him. He was unshaven and shaky — I suspected that he had a severe hangover. Oh, these artists! Such a magnificent sense of proportion on canvas, but none at all in their personal lives! I refused to buy any of the five paintings, in spite of the pleading I saw in his eyes. He needed money for drink, but I resolved that he would have to earn it. I remembered that his paw had painted a famous picture of a white horse, and so I said, “Emile, I will give you your first commission. I want you to go back around the corner and paint me a picture of a horse. *Un cheval*. You paint *un cheval*. *Pour mot*. One hundred francs I give you.”

He looked at me, not quite understanding, for his brain was fuzzed up from his drinking. I took out a scratch pad and made a quick sketch of a horse.

“Suck pig?” he said. “Suck pig? Suck pig?”

“Jesus!” I said with some asperity. “No suck pig! Horse. *Cheval*”

“Ah!” he exclaimed. I wanted my horse done in black and white, so I might be able to reproduce it in my book, but I had difficulty getting this across to him and Nelle went around the corner to show him which crayon to use.

Six minutes later he came racing down the sidewalk with the god damndest horse ever seen on land or sea. I have never known an artist quite so eager to please. He sat down on the edge of a chair next to me and waited while I examined the painting. The horse’s head was not on straight and it had six legs. The artist had attached two spidery legs to the animal’s stomach and then decided that they were not artistically correct, and so he added two legs at the rear — legs that sort of dwindled off into a graceful nothingness. He did not remove the middle set of legs. A Gauguin never erases.

I looked at it a long time and finally I said, “God-a-mighty, what a horse!”

Emile jerked back as if I had slapped him. He thought that I had spoken a critical remark, that I did not like the picture, that I was being querulous about the horse’s head. Quickly he spoke in defense of

his draughtsmanship.

"This," he said, "is a special horse. It is saying, 'Grrrrrruff! Grrrrrruff! Grrrrrruff!' " As he uttered these snarling, barking sounds, Emile whipped his big head around to one side. He was trying to justify the position of the horsed head by telling me the horse was snarling and snapping like a dog. Great Scott! As if he had to defend the posture of that horse! Yet there were small-minded skeptics present, as we shall presently see.

I handed over a hundred-franc note and Emile took off like a guided missile. I was so pleased with the horse that I chased after him and told him I wanted him to do another picture in the tradition of his famous father — a picture of a Tahitian girl. "Paint *vahine*" I said. "One hundred francs for paint *vahine*. Make dance." I wiggled my hips. To hell with what people might think. Emile responded with complete understanding. "Me paint *vahine* " he said. He wiggled *his* hips. In ordinary circumstances I would have said the movement was vulgar, but this was different. He headed for his box and his barrel.

Back at Vaima three travelers we had met, two gentlemen and a woman, had joined our table. One of the men, a dealer in electrical appliances from Oklahoma, asked if he might see the horse. He studied it awhile.

"That's the craziest damn horse I've ever seen," he said.

"Of course," I said. "It looks crazy to you. But don't you understand anything about art? That is a horse the way Emile Gauguin sees a horse."

"It looks surprised," said the lady. "It has a surprised look on its face."

"I'm sure," I said, "that Emile intended it to look surprised."

The horse is snapping and snarling, probably at an enemy." "I heard him make those noises," said the Oklahoma gentleman. "No horse ever made noises like that. Those were dog noises. What you got here, my friend, is a picture of a dog, not a horse. And a six-legged dog at that."

I gave up. No point in arguing with such a provincial nitwit. It is ever thus — the world is full of scoffers, unable to see beyond the tips of their noses, unable to understand that in art and in literature there is deep symbolism, and sometimes violent emotional stirrings hidden behind the most innocently placid of exteriors. I felt happiness in the knowledge that I long ago escaped from the Midwest. In New York we are not contumelious and niggling about Art.

I was putting the horse away in Nelle's bag when Emile arrived again on the gallop. He was waving a new painting in the air. It is the one I now have in my Gauguin collection, done in greens and purples and blacks, and called "Vahine Dancing by Moonlight." The instant I

first looked upon it I knew there was a slapdash greatness in it. I *felt* that picture, and I had a moment of panic, thinking that someone else might get it, and so I hauled out another hundred francs and gave it to the artist. ‘Watch it, John Dee,’ said Nelle. She then got out the horse picture and asked Emile to identify an object in the upper right-hand corner.

“Pine app,” said Emile.

“*Oui*, of course,” said Nelle.

Emile was bubbling with good-feeling and Hinano and he seized the picture from her hands and, placing it on his fat knee, took a pencil and began adding more figures. He quickly sketched three elongated objects next to the pine app and announced that they were ban-nann. Then he put in three little circles on the other side of the pine app and said they were lee-mone. My God there was no end to the man’s burst of inspiration this day!

After he had gone the Oklahoma man made some more snotty remarks. He said that instead of putting all that fruit into the picture, Emile ought to have fixed the back end of the horse itself.

“I never saw a horse that feathered off at the back end like that,” he said.

I chose to ignore the oaf.

We sat for a while longer and then Emile returned with preliminary sketches of several horses in various postures, including one standing on his hind legs and clawing at the scenery. But I had to tell him I could take no more pictures. I had shot my wad.

February 21

THE MORAL values are all shot to hell, not alone in the United States but everywhere else on earth. It is depressing to think that the human race is now putting financial gain above all other considerations. There is no honor left, no integrity. Maybe the Seventh Day Adventists are right and the bugles are blowing for Armageddon. Nelle passed the Oceanic garage today and caught Emile Gauguin engaged in malpractice and bald dishonesty. He had brought in another wooden box and put it back in the shadows. Sitting on the floor were two schoolboys, working at something on the box. Before Emile could warn them, Nelle walked back and saw that those boys were making horses on drawing paper, using Emile's crayons. On the third day of his professional career Emile had succumbed to greed. *Auwe!* The times are hideous, and out of joint! Nelle was indignant of course and shook her finger at Emile, like a schoolteacher, and said, "No, no, no, no, no! Not boys paint! *You* paint!" She told me later that Emile just gave her a sheepish grin.

I shall buy no more Gauguins. I know that the three I have are genuine, done by the master and signed by his hand. I could no longer be certain about any later works.

From various local sources I have finally pieced together the remarkable story of the young Abbé Pierre. That was not his real name though people in Tahiti speak of him as Abbé Pierre, possibly because of the story's Balzacian flavor.

He was blond and boyishly handsome and in his early twenties when he stepped off a ship from France and he was wearing a beautiful white silk cassock. That was about six years ago. He was, he said, the Abbé Henri de Moulières de Champgrand. He made his way to the Bishops house and there presented his credentials, which included letters from several cardinals and a commendation from a high authority in the Vatican. The young man made it clear that he was a member of an aristocratic French family and that he had given up great wealth for the priesthood. The Bishop of Tahiti took an immediate liking to the young priest and, being short of help, asked him to stay on the island and work out of the cathedral in Papeete.

Abbé Pierre was from the outset a clerical sensation in Tahiti, especially among the women, in particular among the older women. They began competing among themselves for the honor of entertaining this sweet boy who happened to be a priest. He ate well. Not a day passed that he didn't have an invitation to a fine dinner in the home of one or another of the parish women. They sewed for him,

running up handsome silken shirts to go with his white cassocks. They swarmed around him when he walked the streets of Papeete. At length they got together a fund and bought him a pretty automobile. Oh, the Abbé Pierre was doing first rate in Paradise!

He leased a nice house not far from Maison Louise in Pirae. On one of the walls was a picture of a European castle. He would gesture toward this picture and say, "One of my family's ranch houses." He was an authentic whizzer, the Abbé Pierre. Eventually the women of the parish were clucking and mothering over him so much that the Bishop grew uneasy. He decided to make a change. He called the young man into his presence and told him he was being transferred to the church in the district of Papara on the far side of the island. The Abbé Pierre was understandably provoked about the change and once settled in Papara he began secretly writing letters to people in faraway lands. He wrote to cardinals and archbishops and other high churchmen and in most convincing terms spoke of how poorly Mother Church was doing in this remote Pacific island, of the great need for funds to feed and clothe the needy. None of these letters went to his native France for in each one he complained that the mother country was contributing almost nothing to the church in Tahiti. It is said that he even wrote to Francis Cardinal Spellman in New York.

The letters brought results. Money began to come to the Abbé Pierre in Papara, and the Bishop of Tahiti knew naught of it. And now the young priest grew even bolder. He began a campaign, subtle and insidious, aimed at unseating the reigning Bishop who had sent him to the Siberia of Papara. He wrote straight to the Vatican recommending that he, the Abbé Pierre, should be made Bishop of Tahiti or if not that, Bishop of something — perhaps the Windward Islands of French Polynesia.

Eventually word of these subversive letters reached the Bishop and he was upset and he was debating a course of action when Fate stepped in and dealt a crushing blow to the young priest. It had been talked around in Papeete, especially among the men, that there was something passing strange in the manner and behavior of the Abbé Pierre. There were some who spoke out boldly and said they thought him to be passing queer. One man who brushed elbows with him at the post office reported to his friends: "That guy smells like a two-dollar whore." It was widely known that in his house the Abbé had an elaborate dressing table fit for a movie queen, its surface loaded with emulsions and ointments and powders and perfumes. He did, in sooth, smell like a two-dollar whore.

There was verification for these suspicions soon to come. Each district of Tahiti has its Protestant church as well as its Catholic. The pastor of the Protestant church in Papara was the father of an

adolescent boy and one day this boy came to his father with a story.

"Father," he said, "there is something strange about the Abbé Pierre."

"Strange?" said the pastor. "How do you mean strange?"

"He has been making indecent propositions to me," said the boy.

That did it. The Protestant minister set up a great clamor and the Abbé Pierre was arrested and brought to trial. He was not charged with impersonating a priest. It was soon learned that his true name was Robert Moulières. In France he had been employed as a secretary in the religious order which he had chosen as his own. Through artifice and forgery he had actually gotten himself ordained and consecrated in the priesthood. He was, in truth, in the eyes of God and in the eyes of civil law a consecrated priest. Once a priest always a priest, and so they could not get him on that rap. They chose not to get him on the rap of homosexuality — the evidence of the waterfront would suggest that the French have no great objection to sexual deviates. So they charged him with embezzlement and convicted him and placed him in the local prison — the same jail where Emile Gauguin spends a large part of his time.

Even then the elderly ladies of Papeete refused to give up on him. They came singly and in groups across the bridge to the prison, bringing hand-wrought silken things, and goodies of one kind or another. They came in such numbers that the prison authorities finally complained. They took him out and put him on a ship and sent him to the prison on the French island of New Caledonia, northeast of Australia.

Balzac is long gone. And it is too bad that Somerset Maugham is such an old party. He could do something with the story of the Abbé Pierre. As the saying goes, it is right up his alley.

Tonight Ripley Gooding and his *vahine* joined us for dinner at the Hotel Taaone. Ripley was in a hearty mood and his booming laughter echoed through the hotel grounds. It could almost be said that Ripley is a living argument in favor of hard drinking. He tastes and savors every drink as if it were the last one he'll have on earth. He exclaims over the bouquet of it, the warmth of it, the pure delight of it. His big rugged face glows with it.

"I've got a bad heart and a worse liver," he said. "I won't be around much longer. So, let's drink up! What the hell! Look at all the guys in the world who are blind or crippled or got cancer or got this Parkinson's disease or a thousand other terrible things that can happen to a man. We're in real good shape. What's a bum liver, a bad heart? Come on — let's have a drink on it!"

February 22

I'VE WRITTEN glowingly about Tahiti in letters to Boston that I've now been instructed to get some good photographs for possible use in my book. Apparently I have pictured my Dauphine in such affectionate terms that they even want a picture of me with the car. So I engaged Gerard Pugin, the handsome young photographer who works for the local newspaper, to spend this afternoon taking pictures. We met for lunch at Hotel Tahiti and he said he had been up early this morning because Marlon Brando had flown in from California to spend two or three weeks vacationing here. At lunch I outlined the various shots I thought we would need. We started with some pictures of Ralph Varady and then drove up the Route de Maraichers to the hilltop from which all of Papeete can be seen, plus the airstrip and Moorea and the reef and Point Venus. Then to the hotel which Ripley Gooding is building. Ripley was taking a nap in one of the cottages but he came roaring out, wearing shorts and his big planter's hat. Later Gerard told me he was surprised at Ripley's willingness to pose because he is ordinarily camera-shy and the newspaper doesn't have a single photograph of him in its files.

Our next date was at the home of Carlos Palacios. I had specified three o'clock but there was nobody home except the pet monkey and the Tahitian boy who hangs around the place and runs errands. I asked the boy where Carlos and Agnes had gone and he said, "Marr Bombo come." So we sat around and in about ten minutes they arrived — Carlos and Agnes, Marr Bombo and his leading lady Tarita. I would never have recognized Brando if I'd met him on the street. He was fat almost beyond belief, and pasty-faced. There were introductions all around and I told Brando that I planned on writing a book about Tahiti, and that I would be grateful if he and Tarita would pose for a picture.

He gave me a long searching look and then said: "What part of the South you from?" I said I was not from the South, I was originally from Illinois. "Well!" he said. "I'm from Illinois too — place called Libertyville." I said I knew about Libertyville. And I repeated my request for a photograph.

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that," said Brando. "It's a matter of personal policy that I never pose for pictures."

"I thought you made a living posing for pictures," I said.

"I mean," he said, "publicity pictures. It's a matter of personal policy that I never do anything for publicity."

I told him I wasn't working for a newspaper, or even a magazine, that I was working on a book, that the book wouldn't be out for

perhaps a year, that it wasn't really a publicity thing. But he stood firm and I said okay if that's the way you feel and under my breath I said oo-scray oo-yay. I went onto the porch and asked Tarita if she would pose and she said it was a matter of personal policy that she never poses for pictures. I asked Agnes, who has a secondary part in the *Bounty* picture, and she said sure. She would teach me how to plait flowers in The Tahitian Way and Gerard could photograph us doing it. So we went about our business. I was pretty sore. I'm afraid I sulked a bit because I wouldn't go back on the porch where the others were congregated.

After a while I heard Brando talking to Nelle, discussing my books. "I've always wondered," he said, "where he gets those marvelous titles, like for example *Life in a Putty Knife Factory*." Carlos called out to me, "Hey! Marlon wants to know where you get the wonderful titles for your books." I wanted to say, I even started to say, "It is a matter of personal policy that I do not discuss my book titles with slob movie actors." I didn't say it because I am either a gentleman or I was a chicken, and I know I'm not a gentleman.

So we left and went back to Papeete and took some shots in a favorite setting, the outdoor tables at Bar Vaima. After that we went around and got some pictures of Emile at work with his crayons. The artist was morose and moody because I was not buying any more of his paintings, but I gave him a hundred francs for posing, and he began at once to shout joyfully for the benefit of the small crowd that had gathered to watch the proceedings. "Me Gauguin!" he yelled. "Me great! Me paint!"

Mercurial, temperamental, unpredictable. It is the same with all true and sensitive artists. The same with Emile Gauguin as it is with Marlon Brando.

February 23

CHAO LEON has made me several pairs of snow-white slacks and one white slack suit. I thought it necessary that I have white shoes to match and so I went to the store downwind from Bar Vaima, the biggest shoe store in town. The product here is of French manufacture and I am now greatly puzzled about French feet. A Frenchman's foot surely is not organized the way we have our feet. I tried on half a dozen pairs of shoes and they seemed to have no relation whatever to my hooves. It was as if a legless shoemaker who had never seen a human foot had made a pair of shoes on plans submitted by the same committee that is said to have put together the giraffe.

I bought a pair of white shoes, however, and wore them briefly yesterday during the photographing. I spoke to Gerard Pugin about their peculiar conformation and he said, "Oh. I imagine no one has told you that French shoes have to be conditioned before you wear them. What you do is take them home and fill each shoe full of warm water. Let the water stand in them three minutes. Then pour it out and put the shoes on and walk around in them a while. They will shape themselves to your feet and be quite comfortable after that."

The world is full of practical jokers and this sounded prankish to me, but Gerard assured me he was giving it to me straight — he came out to Tahiti as a soldier in the French Army and he said that all French soldiers put warm water in new shoes. So last night, before bed, I did it with my whites. I filled each shoe with warm water and then used an egg-timer on them and after three minutes dumped the water out and put the shoes on. I walked around in the house and in the garden. It was unpleasant going in those sopping, squishy shoes, but I stayed with it for about twenty minutes. This morning I put them on again. They seemed a bit stiffish. I tried to walk and felt as if someone were applying thumbscrews to my tibiotarsal articulation. My feet hurt all over, circumferentially. I took the shoes off and gave them to one of the girls and told her that if she ever got frequent with a Frenchman she could give them to him for Christmas.

A government *fonctionnaire* and his lady came for cocktails this afternoon. In recent weeks we have become fairly well acquainted with them and have visited their home and met their children. There is not a hint of arrogance or meanness in them and, in fact, they are pleasant and intelligent company.

M. Belliveau said that one of the bothersome problems the Government has to contend with is the periodic petition from one or another of the local churches. Just today another such petition arrived from one of the peculiar sects of the island. These people called upon

the Government to take steps immediately to shut down the Hinano brewery (it is Tahiti's most profitable industry) and to close all of Tony Bambridge's movie theaters and then to advance Government funds toward the building of twice as many churches as there are now on the island. The petition added that there were too many football fields in Tahiti — "the people are more interested in the welfare of their bodies than of their souls." M. Belliveau said that the tone and content of this petition are much the same as the tone and content of other petitions that arrive at the Governors office from time to time. He gave it as his personal opinion that the brewery is a fine thing for Tahiti. Before it was established shiploads of cheap wine came from France and the natives drank it, plus the dreadful rum that is manufactured out at Atimaono. The combination of the inferior wine and the gasoline-type rum left few sound stomachs among the natives. Now their steady tippie is Hinano beer and though a few people like Baldwin Bambridge complain about it, there are no more Tahitian drunks today than there were in former times. In fact, there are about the same number. Nearly everybody.

Tonight Charles Petras and his Chinese wife Claire had us for dinner at their home. At last, here in a land of five or six thousand Chinese, we finally got a first-rate Chinese meal. From crab soup to lychee, from excellent roast duck to a chicken dish, it was superb and there were carafes of rose wine to give it the French touch.

February 24

ONE DAY I was sitting at Bar Vaima when a small boat, the *Hinano*, was being tied up to one of the half-buried cannon that line the waterfront. A woman at a nearby table looked at the boat and exclaimed: "My God, they named a boat after a bottle of beer." She was in error. Hinano is the name of a flower and it is also the name of many Tahitians. The brown young man hired by the Carl Heintzes to serve as cook aboard the *Wanderlure* during its world cruise was named Hinano. And today there are many gossips about another Hinano. This one is the tiny waitress at the Hotel Tahiti who used to come up behind us in the dining room and sing out, "Oooooooooooooo-hooooooooooooo! Here I am!" Her full name is Madeleine Hinano Chang Phang and she has been a good friend of Nelle's all these past weeks. She is possibly the smallest adult I have ever seen, not counting midgets. She is in her twenties, but she has the body of a ten-year-old girl, and a thin one at that. Yet she has enormous energy when going about her work at the hotel. She is the most efficient and fastest and pleasantest waitress in town. She has the status of an adopted daughter in the home of Muriel Gooding, who is Ripley's sister and who lives just a stones throw from our house.

A few weeks ago an unattached businessman from Switzerland was a guest at the hotel. Hinano served his meals to him and they talked and this Swiss gentleman thought she was as cute as a pearl button. It is even suspected that they went out together a couple of times while he was here. Now the news is out. In the mail this week came a letter for Hinano, containing a plane ticket for Switzerland and a check to cover incidental expenses. The Swiss gentleman wants Hinano to come for a visit and perhaps to stay for keeps. He promises that if she is not satisfied with the way things work out, he will guarantee her passage back to Tahiti.

Should she accept? The question has been debated all over town this week, for Hinano is known to everyone. There is no question whatever about the moral side of the proposition. Nothing wrong there. It's just that Hinano is so tiny, and traveling all that distance by herself! And how could she be certain the man would give her the money to get home?

The word today is that Hinano settled the matter herself. She simply said, "Oooooooooooooo-hooooooooooooo!" and started packing her bag.

Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Therese and Bengt's secretary, a French girl, came to dinner with us tonight. We are going into our last week and we still believe that these people are the most stimulating

company on the island. Bengt was full of stories. When he and his bride first arrived they occupied a single room at one of the waterfront hotels, a room with a bed, a sheet, a naked light bulb and a cloth curtain for a door. It was hazardous living in the small hours of the night, for there was frequent traffic in the hallways. Sometimes people would walk right into their room. Usually it would be a sailor with a native girl in tow. Bengt would be awakened by one of these lads punching him and then saying, "Hey, bud, you talk French?" The Swede is always accommodating, and he would say yes. "Ask this broad how much she charges," the sailor would say. Bengt would ask her, and she'd state her price, and then the sailor would say, "Offer her half that much." It was pretty harrowing, said Marie-Therese, to have her new husband prodded out of sleep in the middle of the night and put to work haggling in French and English and Tahitian.

"In those years," said Bengt, "the mail situation was not good and after we moved out to Paea I had a wonderful arrangement with the driver of Le Truck. If a letter came for me, he would pick it up and put it in his hatband so he wouldn't forget to drop it off for me. Sometimes it would stay in his hatband for two weeks."

We talked about how The Tahitian Way is upside-down and backwards when compared with the American and European manner of romantic life, and Bengt went into the subject of Polynesian standards of beauty. The ideal woman in these islands was always fat and pale, with a short neck, no waist, colossal breasts and hips and thighs, and a nose set flat against her face. And whereas the Western woman painted her face and rouged her lips, the Tahitian woman had her buttocks tastefully tattooed. The native women, in fact, considered red lips to be revolting and they went through the painful process of having their lips tattooed blue. Every Tahitian girl yearns to have a white skin. Consequently the *vahines* think that Western women are crazy when they stretch themselves out to tan their skins in the sun.

In former times the importance of being both fat and pale led to the establishment of an Elizabeth Arden type of conditioning resort on Tetiaroa atoll, twenty-five miles north of Papeete — the same place that was called Cat Island in the fraudulent magazine article. The older children of the kings and chiefs of Tahiti were transported to this atoll and shut indoors for at least a month under a rigid program aimed at making them pale and flabby. The conditioning houses were carefully sealed so that no slightest ray of light ever entered. The floor was covered with fern leaves, which were sprayed with coconut oil. The young people were required to lie down on this floor, and then they were covered, head and all, with mats. They could come out from under the mats only at night, when they were fed and when they were

taken out to the beach to evacuate. They were fed on the most fattening foods and they were required to keep some of it under their mats in the daytime, and continue eating it. After a month or more of this treatment, they were led out of their prison and taken back to Tahiti where they were paraded proudly before the populace. Sometimes they had grown so fat that they could not walk, and had to be supported by servants. Under the standards of those times, Emile Gauguin is today the most desirable man in Tahiti.

February 25

THIS BEING our last Sunday we got up at half past four and went downtown to the market. Sunday morning at five is the big hour at the market and we knew it the moment we hit the Broom Road. The bike traffic was as brisk as it is at noontime on weekdays. And when we finally found a place to park and made our way to the big sheds which house the market, it seemed to us that every living Tahitian was there, plus a good proportion of the Chinese and a scattering of *papaas*. The streets around the market were jammed with bicycles and scooters and people were shoulder to shoulder everywhere, carrying strings of fish or big chunks of tuna on sennit cord and bludgeons of taro root and bags of fruit and loaves of French bread and a thousand other things. In all that crowd there was no rude pushing and everyone was in a friendly and carnival mood. I stepped on a woman's bare foot and expected at least a hard glare, but instead she smiled at me and said something in the soft language of Tahiti. Inside the shed where the fruit is stacked we moved up and down the crowded aisles and I noticed a thickset native man just ahead of us — the girls and women attending each table along the way got a hearty slap on the bottom as he passed, and none seemed to mind. I suppose they were all his cousins.

Back at the house I was on the terrace enjoying the early sun when a truck passed eastward on the Broom Road carrying a party of musicians to a party somewhere on the island. The drummers were thumping out the basic Tahitian rhythm as the truck moved east, and I listened to it carefully and got the beat and wrote it down: "Thump . . . Thump . . . Tiddeley-iddeley Thump!" Over and over and over. It is a sound heard often in all districts of the island and in other parts of Polynesia. The music of Tahiti is, in fact, mostly drumming.

For our last Sunday Bill Stone and Teuru invited us to a native-style feast, or *tamaaraa*, at their home. We arrived before noon and the food was already cooking in the underground oven. The rum punch and the *Hinano* were flowing in a riptide. Jimmie Nordhoff was present, along with his brother Charlie. This was the first time we had met Charlie. Present also were two couples, the Andersons and the Mathews, from the Palo Alto area in California, and Barbara Marthens and Audrey Lyall and Francis Bunkley and Judy Chappell. Charlie Nordhoff and two Tahitian boys named Hiro and Manu formed themselves into an orchestra and the music began on the big terrace. They had a factory-made ukulele, and a homemade one fashioned from half a coconut shell, and one guitar, and a gut-bucket. The gut-bucket is the bass instrument of Tahiti. This one was made from a

five gallon Caltex kerosene can, about half full of water. It had a metal handle on top and a length of heavy cord was tied to this, leading up to the top of a bamboo pole. The gut-bucketeer stands back of the can and moves the bamboo pole to vary the tension on the cord, and plucks the cord to create as fine a bass beat as you ever heard.

They played on for hours and Charlie Nordhoff, a happy-seeming guy about thirty who works as a commercial fisherman, never once left the group, and stopped playing and singing only long enough to deal with the pitchers of rum that were passed around the crowd. Teuru sang some of the native songs, and Bill Stone chimed in now and then. I scribbled down a note to the effect that the lyrics of all the Tahitian songs are variations of the same theme: You Left Me and Run Off With Another Woman You Dirty Dog You.

At last they dug up the suckling pig and the fish and all the other lovely food and the feast itself lasted a couple of hours. It was all ultramundane.

February 26

LOUISE reported to us this morning that a ghost was seen on the premises last night. Miri saw it. Miri said the ghost was wearing a long white robe and standing near the breadfruit tree opposite our kitchen door and going whooo-whooo. Louise said to Miri: "It was not a ghost, you silly one. It was one of your boy friends tomcatting around." Miri insisted it was a ghost. "I don't have any boy friends who wear white robes and go whooo-whooo," she said.

Godefroy de Noailat came for lunch and we pulled together some loose ends. This amiable young Frenchman is required to spend much of his time defending the bureaucrats who run Tahiti, and he does well at the job.

"It is like this," he said. "Here in Tahiti the people have no baseball and no television and no advertising and so they have nothing to complain about, so they complain about the government. If you would go to some of the places that are run by your own country, and do an investigation, you would find that the government in Tahiti is very friendly and nice and liberal. You should be a Frenchman or any other kind of a foreigner and go to American Samoa and see what happens. You will be kicked all over the place and treated like a spy and a leper. It is much worse for a Frenchman in Samoa than it is for an American in Tahiti."

He overlooks one important point, that an American, under God and by the very nature of things, is far superior to a Frenchman in every way, and far superior to any foreigner for that matter, and a Frenchman cannot ever expect to be treated as if he had the same nobility and the same general qualities as an American. Somehow this is a thing that foreigners cannot understand about us.

A few years ago I read an article by the great Irishman Sean O'Casey in which he spoke of his advanced age (he was pushing eighty) and of the nearness of death. He observed that the world is so full of so many wonderful things that he could scarcely abide the thought of leaving them, and so he found himself going about the countryside and touching them. Trees and fences and houses and animals and people. I feel somewhat the same about Tahiti and the sad fact that we must be leaving early next Sunday morning.

So this afternoon, thinking of O'Casey, I wandered along the waterfront and looked at the boats that are tied up along the street and whiffed the fine smell of copra and spoke to a surprising number of people with whom I am now acquainted. Along the way I touched a Tahitian girl, to feel again that satin softness. She didn't mind. Then along came Ripley Gooding in a truck, hauling some building

material out to his place, and I hailed him and he stopped for a short visit. In addition to everything else Ripley is an apprentice ethnologist, and he spoke of a matter which he thinks will be troublesome for Tahiti in the future.

“A lot of crazy people come here,” he said, “like the movie actors and the nuts and the yachts and you writers, and these people get involved with our lovely little Tahitian ladies, and they leave some babies here when they go away. This is a bad thing, and dangerous. It is possible, I think, that a race of monsters is going to come out of this.”

A question that has been troubling me came into my mind. It is my custom when I am driving the streets and highways of Tahiti to get behind a girl on a bike, a shapely girl who might be wearing slacks or a tight dress, and stay behind her and look at the movement of her posterior. If she is pedaling a bicycle, then the movement is a provocative, undulating, rolling sort of thing that could lead a man with no self-restraint to bite chunks out of his steering wheel. If the girl is on a motorized bike, then the movement is jouncy, and just as provocative. Fearing that I might be guilty of an evil and unnatural practice, a sort of bicycle *frottage*, I summoned up all my courage and asked Ripley if *he* ever does it.

“All the time,” he said. “I look at nothing else on the road. I am always running into trees.”

And so, with feelings of relief, I can say that it is one of the better things to do in Tahiti, one of the lovelier spectacles. In some respects it is better than the scenery.

February 27

IT IS OFTEN said that the Polynesians are the most naturally amphibious people in the world and that they are more at home on water than they are on land.

I have encountered this statement from time to time in the books about the South Pacific and it has always had a look of wrongness. If the Polynesians are so amphibious, why is it that they almost always get horribly seasick voyaging the few miles to Moorea or simply taking a canoe a few yards outside the reef?

Now I have met an intelligent man who has a theory on the subject. He is Robert McEwan, director of education in the Cook Islands with headquarters at Raratonga. Mr. McEwan is a redheaded native of New Zealand and his work keeps him traveling to the scattered islands of the Cook group a good part of each year. Almost always he travels by copra schooner, the subways of the South Pacific, and almost always the decks of these ships are crowded with natives and domesticated animals. And these Polynesians, these superbly amphibious people, suffer from seasickness en masse, and without cessation. Male and female. (There is a saying that when the launch from Moorea touches shore at Papeete, people start heaving for a half mile in every direction.)

Mr. McEwan spoke of the late Peter Buck, the Honolulu scholar who was half Polynesian and who spent his life arguing that the Polynesians were among history's greatest navigators.

"It is difficult to believe," said Mr. McEwan, "that a people so prone to seasickness could ever have been great navigators. Yet they have that reputation. I'm more inclined to go along with Andrew Sharp, the New Zealand writer, who said the Polynesians in their canoes were such miserable sailors, such inept navigators, that they were always getting lost at sea. Most of them probably perished, but some of the lost canoes drifted great distances, all over the South Pacific, and arrived at last at some uninhabited island. Out of all this fumbling and drifting came the reputation of the Great Navigators."

Because he has been traveling on copra boats for years, I asked Mr. McEwan for an opinion on another question, namely, the smell of copra, which seems to be sickening to many *popaas*.

"Copra has been given a bad name," said Mr. McEwan, "because of its association, or combination, with other odors. The basic odor of copra is not bad at all; in fact, I think it quite pleasant. But on a copra schooner there are other smells. The passengers live and sleep on deck. Many of them have their pigs and goats and chickens with them and they insist on keeping their livestock close beside them. The

better class of natives have buckets with ropes on them, and these they use as toilets. But the pigs and goats and chickens have no buckets. And the seasickness is so common, among the animals as well as their owners, that things become incredibly messy. Over and above all this is the heady odor of the copra. I tell you, it takes a strong stomach. And the copra itself is not the villain.”

February 28

A VISITOR in the office of Dave Cave, owner of my Dauphine and about fifty of her sisters, might get the impression that Dave is an admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte. There are pictures of Napoleon on the walls and busts of Napoleon on the desk and the table. Dave and his family live near us, on the road leading in to the Hotel Taaone, and there are more Napoleons in his house, and a big collection of books dealing with Bonaparte's life and times.

When I was about twenty years old I read Emil Ludwig's biography of Napoleon and then went on a Bonaparte kick that lasted two or three years. But I got over it. Not so Dave Cave. He has stayed with his hero without flinch or falter and he will go to the bridge with Napoleon right to the very end.

The Caves are getting ready for a trip around the world and when I stopped in today to arrange about turning in my car, I decided I would give Dave the benefit of my great knowledge. I said that I assumed he would be spending some time in Paris and he said oh sure.

"When I was in Paris," I said, "I went to the tomb of Napoleon. It is known, by the way, as Dess Invalids. I wasn't expecting much, not very excited about it. Your friend is actually in a tomb there. I stood in that great rotunda and looked at that sarcophagus and suddenly it became the most stupendous thing I had seen anywhere in Europe. It did something to me, somehow. I thought I'd tell you a few things about it, because it's something you shouldn't miss."

"Yes," said Dave, "I know. I've talked to many people who've been there and most of them have the same reaction. I'm certainly looking forward to it."

Then he started talking about that tomb. He told about the periodic opening of the sarcophagus and the impressive ceremony attending it and the identity and rank of the people who are allowed to be present. He described the hoisting device that is used for removing the sarcophagus lid, mentioning the exact weight of the lid, in pounds and in kilos, and the weight of the rest of it. He told how the Corsican's uniform is changed, and what it is made of, and the color of it, and how the satin lining of the coffin is replaced. He talked about the physical condition of the body when Napoleon died and what a masterful job the embalmer did — the body today looks as if the man died only yesterday. He gave the name of the embalmer and spoke of his family and told me what thoughts were running through the guy's mind as he worked over the corpse.

I was a little embarrassed, but more than that I had a feeling of wonder about the whole thing — about the fact that Dave was going

to Paris at last and stand before that sarcophagus. I almost envied him his enthusiasm. In a way I have the same sort of feeling . . . for a man named Clemens.

Dave Cave is no longer an American national — he has just recently become a French citizen. He came from Bakersfield and Los Angeles and while he was attending Fairfax High in Los Angeles he met the most charming of all the Tahiti Bambridges — Leone. It has long been a custom among people of means in Tahiti to send their children to school in the States and Leone was getting her education when Big Dave came along. They were married and he went into the Navy and after the war they came and settled in Leone's native land.

Leone worked for M-G-M during the months the film company was here and Dave was kept busy renting cars to the visitors from Hollywood. Leone and Aurora Natua sometimes worked together scouting for native talent. Leone made a systematic circuit of the island, visiting every Tahitian home she could find and looking over the people to see if they would be adequate as extras, or as bit players, in the picture. Whenever she found Tahitians who looked to be good prospects, she snapped pictures of them and asked if they wanted to pick up some nice money acting in the movies. Most of them were overjoyed at the prospect, and thought that they would be performing in a cowboy picture, and began going through the motions of drawing and shooting.

A few months ago Fred Zimmerman, the Hollywood director, was here with some assistants making preliminary plans for scenes that will be included in the movie version of Michener's novel *Hawaii*. Leone was put to work at once, scouting for local talent. She found one Tahitian girl who was beautiful except for her teeth. This girl was acceptable to Zimmerman and before returning to California he left instructions that the teeth were to be fixed. Eventually Leone wrote to the director, in a letter that has become locally famous, saying that the girl would be ready by a certain date, complete with dazzling dentures. Leone, however, saw a chance of trouble ahead on account of those gleaming new teeth. "You better hurry," she warned Mr. Zimmerman, "because she may get a baby in her stomach."

March 1

THERE ARE some people in Papeete, no doubt, who think that I spend altogether too much time sitting at Bar Vaima, that I am destroying my keen analytical mind and throwing my God-given talent to the beer-laden winds. To such people I can only say, with great humility, *mea culpa mea culpa* and you can go straight to hell.

Yesterday afternoon a young man from New Zealand came up to our table and asked if he might sit with us since all the other tables were occupied. His head was almost completely encased in bandages with only his eyes, nose and mouth showing. His arms and legs were likewise heavily bandaged, and such skin as was visible had been drenched in mercurochrome.

“Well,” I said, “what happened?”

“Vespa,” he replied. He pushed a swallow of beer through his bandages. He reminded me of The Invisible Man in the television series. “I’m a clerk in a store in Auckland,” he went on. “I saved up my money for five years so I could spend a month in Tahiti. Paradise, beautiful and willing girls, all that. I came in on the *Oranje* a week ago. There was this lovely girl I had met on board, and the ship would only be here one night, so I asked her for a date. I rented a Vespa and she got on behind me and we ended up dancing at the Lafayette. Not much drinking — just a little beer. So about half past three in the morning we started back for the ship. We were going at a pretty good speed and then we hit this dead dog that was lying on the pavement. Went into a terrible skid and the Vespa seemed to rocket into the air and it came down on top of me and I went out. When I came to I was in the hospital with all these bandages on me. I thought I was dying. Then I remembered about the girl and I said to myself, my God I’ve killed her. But they told me she had been thrown clear and only scratched up a bit and she had made it back to the ship and the ship was gone. So here I am. Not a very pleasant way to spend the Tahiti vacation I’ve been dreaming about for so long. But I guess I’ll make out.”

Today I was sitting at the same table, thinking about New Zealand and Australia and Fiji and Samoa — the places we’ll be visiting soon. I looked up and saw a *vahine* sitting at another table. She was quite young and small, with some Chinese in her, and straight features, and my gaze stayed on her for a long time because she was beautiful. Then her companion arrived carrying drinks from the bar — our friend of yesterday. It was soon apparent that he had made it with this delicious creature. And not a single bandage had been taken off. That girl had accepted him without the slightest knowledge of what he looks like.

I guess it's true about Tahiti.

And now, even as The Invisible Man sipped his Hinano with his dazzling *vahine*, another gentleman made his presence known. He talked to us first from a distance, and then came over and joined us. He was in his early thirties, an engineer from Pittsburgh, and he had been somewhere in Australia supervising the installation of some American machinery in a big factory. He had no hesitation about telling us a good portion of his life story. He plays several musical instruments and was once in a popular dance band. He writes what he described as seventeen-line erotic Japanese verse. He has with him a tape recorder into which he has recited these verses in his own voice. He offered to bring the recorder out to our house and play the recitation for me, and also play a saxophone solo, but I made an excuse because I am not too fond of the saxophone and as for Japanese verse, I never even cared much for Hirohito's work in that field. As soon as our new friend learned that I was a professional writer, he said, "Well! It just happens that I am working on a novel in transit. I wonder if you would mind answering a couple of technical questions." Inasmuch as I seem to spend half my life answering a couple of questions and looking at weird manuscripts I said go ahead.

"Tell me this," he said. "Do you use conversation to explain your plot?"

"Always," I said.

"That's the way I had it figured," he said. "Now. About screwing. Do you put in all the details?"

"Every last one," I said.

"That's the way I intend to do it," he told me.

And now, in the presence of my wife, he spoke of his own sex life. He said that he didn't want to appear to be immodest, but that he is so expert at the business that he is able to induce thirty-one orgasms in his wife at a single session.

I thought this was an interesting statement. The thing that is interesting about it is, how does he keep count? Thirty-one is an odd sort of number. He couldn't keep track on his fingers, or even his fingers and toes. I considered the possibility that he keeps a blackboard alongside the bed, and chalks them down, thus:

||||| ||||| ||||| ||||| ||||| |||||

I simply don't know how else he'd manage it, unless perhaps he

has devised some sort of a toe abacus. I do know that when he got up and left us, Nelle looked at his retreating figure and then said: "This is a nut. A prize-winning nut. I mean Nobel Prize."

As the time for our departure grows closer, there are many errands to perform, many people to see. I have been trying to go through the piles of notes that have accumulated since that day so long, long ago when we left home in the falling snow.

Some of these notes are informative or entertaining and I don't know, at the moment, quite what to do with them, unless I throw them together into a small potpourri of Tahitian lore. So:

Many Chinese men in Tahiti wear their wristwatches some distance from their wrists, almost up to their elbows. I don't know why.

The Polynesian religion recognizes a heaven but it is segregated. There is a plush section for the nobles, and a rather ratty area for the poor people.

The word *tattoo* is of Polynesian origin. So is the practice. The first sailors in all the world who had their arms and chests tattooed did so during visits in Tahiti. The art was invented by a god named Malamala-arahu (printer-in-charcoal). In the old days they began tattooing a Tahitian at the age of ten and kept it up until he reached full growth, by which time he was pretty well covered. Some Tahitians had whole naval battles inscribed on their bodies, and others had coconut trees depicted in the act of mating. There were many cases of sandals being tattooed on the feet, gloves on the hands, and rings on the fingers.

It is said that when Tahitian girls make it to San Francisco they always call the famous bay "the lagoon." And the Golden Gate is, to them, "the pass."

Someone told me that if you make a telephone call by speaking the name of the subscriber rather than his number (I always say Beelstone when I want Bill Stone) you are charged an extra five francs. And if the bank makes an error in your monthly statement, and you report it to them, they assess a charge against you for the bookkeeping involved in getting it corrected.

The Tahitian people have patriotic feelings about their island. One day Nelle was talking to a lady about the insect nuisance. "Yes," said the lady, "it is true that there are a great many of them. But they do not bite as hard as the insects in other countries. The insects of Tahiti are very gentle when they bite you."

There is a famous picture out of Tahitian history showing the arrival of the first missionaries. They are being greeted by a great chief and his chiefess, and these two are perched on the shoulders of husky native servants. This was a mode of transportation required of all chiefs in ancient times. They were so sacred that anything they touched with their bodies became their property. If they walked on the ground every piece of land they set foot on would revert to them. Eventually, under the circumstances, they would dispossess all of their subjects. Something had to be done. So it was decreed that they should always be carried whenever they went abroad in the land. Thus can ecclesiastical law be stretched, loopholed and circumvented, the same as civil law.

During all my twenty-odd years as a freelance writer I have consistently fought clear of all collaboration. I have known quite a few writers who have joined their talents in the production of books or plays. Almost invariably they have ended up hating each other. Sometimes their hatred is so bitter that they take it into the courts. I have always had to agree that there have been a few cases in which literary collaborators were so well suited to one another that they remained close friends forever. Lindsay and Crouse. And, let's see now, who else. Oh, yes. Nordhoff and Hall. And now, even though it seems to be a closely guarded secret of the island, I learn that Nordhoff and Hall quit speaking to each other during the last few years of Nordhoff's life. They ended up disliking each other intensely. Yet nobody in Tahiti told me about the feud. I got it in a letter from a person in the United States, who knew both men quite well. Well, there's still Lindsay and Crouse. But I think I'd better check.

Earlier I have mentioned the tiki, which is the totem pole of Polynesia. They come in sizes from a foot high to thirty feet or more. Nowadays builders use them as supporting columns in their thatched structures. The true tiki shows the sex organs of the figures that are carved on it. There are some tikis around in which the artists went hog wild.

Anthropologists say that Polynesians have “binocular vision” and can see things at far greater distances than other human beings. They also have a sense of smell as keen as that of a dog. Because of this they often complain privately about the odor of white people.

Caroline Guild, in her book, tells about a party at the Guild house in which her husband and a native man engaged in a sham boxing match. During the fight they spit white beans on the ground, as if they were teeth, and used red wine to simulate blood. Mrs. Guild said the Tahitians at the party split their sides laughing.

The Tahitians used to have a game of football that makes ours look like squat tag. It was played on the beach and the goals were a mile apart. The ball was made of tightly wrapped banana leaves. The spectators followed the action by walking or running along the beach. Oftentimes the ball got into the water of the lagoon and had to be played out from there. Much water was splashed, and it was possible for a halfback to get drowned.

Ripley Gooding tells me I should give up writing and come out to Tahiti and paint. Ever since Paul Gauguin was dismissed by the local gentry as a worthless bum, and his paintings burned or thrown in the lagoon; ever since the early velvets of Edgar Leeteg were thrown out with the trash, the people of Tahiti have been kind and attentive in their attitude toward any person who comes along with paintbrush in hand. They have heard, too often, of the fortunes that were thrown away in the past, out of ignorance. It is not going to happen to *them*. “And so,” says Ripley, “the lousiest artist in the world can come out here, and lay drunk, and never take a bath, and he will be treated like a gentleman, and on top of that his pictures will be bought by local people. At good prices.”

March 2

DE NOAILLAT has prepared an interesting paper for me on the regulations designed to Keep Tahiti Tahitian. It leads off with the important provision that no building shall be higher than two-thirds of a coconut tree and the equally vital rule that forbids the erection of billboards anywhere on the island. There is also a regulation forbidding the erection of fences alongside any public road, so that the traveler will almost always have the feeling that he is passing through an unspoiled jungle.

De Noaillat points out the ever-present tendency toward the importation of Hawaiian modes and customs. Always the cry is heard here: Let's not make this another Waikiki! The playing of the rhythmic Tahitian music is encouraged in preference to the dreamier Hawaiian songs. The increased use of tikis in decoration is urged, along with the *tifaifai*, which is the handmade native quilt so popular as a wall decoration among the *popaas*. The government is trying hard to encourage native handicrafts, including the making of these quilts, and the carving of tikis.

The director of *tourisme* concludes with this paragraph:

“Finally, it is worth noting, for the sake of information and to disculpate the Administration, that everyone in Tahiti seems to consider that the laws and regulations necessary for the proper functioning of the community are made for others and not for himself.”

There you are. There is no great basic difference between the people of Tahiti and the rest of us.

Nowadays time flies swiftly in Tahiti. No matter what the Government does there will still be changes in the face of the land from month to month. As I fit together this book I can say that if you go to Tahiti you should visit the Hotel Taaone and order a pepper steak; by the time my book is published and in the reader's hands, Tahiti may have run out of steaks, or there may not even be a Hotel Taaone. And it could be that plans will have been approved for a building five and a half times as high as two-thirds of a coconut tree.

Ralph Varady has told me about an old man who lives on the island of Moorea and who came out many years ago from Switzerland. This is what the old man says:

“People are always complaining that Tahiti is becoming spoiled. Too much progress, they say. They say that with the jet planes coming in from Los Angeles and Honolulu the island is really being ruined. They say that things are not the same as they were when we only had one plane a week. When that one flying boat came down from Bora Bora, ah, those were the days! I remember when we had only that one plane a week. Then the people were complaining about it. They said that damned plane was spoiling the island. They said: ‘You should have been here in the old days, when all we had was a mail boat that came every twenty-eight days. Ah, those were the great times for Tahiti! That was the *real* Tahiti.’ Well, let me tell you something. I came out to Tahiti in 1912 and on the first day they said to me, ‘Alas, you came too late. The place has been spoiled. You should have been here in 1900! *That* was the real Taithi!’ ”

March 2

THE GLEAMING white S. S. *Mariposa* came through the pass this morning and tied up alongside the Territorial Assembly building and we were there to greet all our friends. Later I walked over to Baldwin Bambridge's waterfront office and sat at an upstairs desk looking over a list of the *Mariposa* passengers who will be our shipmates on the long voyage home. Up the stairwell came the sound of a stentorian voice. It was a man talking to Jack Crawford about his reservation on the *Mariposa* and he sounded so authoritative that I got up and went to the head of the stairs and had a look at him. He was a handsome, military-looking guy with a crisp white mustache, tall and lean and straight, and his wife was with him. When he had gone I found out that his name was Ryan and that he was a lawyer from Denver.

We were at the Hotel Tahiti shortly before lunchtime when the same man came in, still with his wife. He walked out to the apron of the terrace to have a good look at the profile of Moorea. I went over to him and said: "I beg your pardon, sir, but you look to me like a man who might have an Irish name and who might be traveling out of here on the *Mariposa*." He didn't blink an eye. "And furthermore," I said, "I would like to take a wild shot and say that you have the look of a man who might be a lawyer. Yes, a lawyer, possibly from the Western part of the United States."

"Well, I'm a son of a bitch," he said. "You got it right, by god, but how in the name of Christ did you know so much about me?"

I then told him how I had overheard him talking in the Bambridge office, and so we shook hands and he said he was Tom Ryan of Denver and I said hell's fire I used to work for the *Denver Post* and he said well good god let's sit down and have a visit and so there we were, a million miles from Sixteenth and Champa (thirty-five years ago who'd have ever dreamed that . . .) and jawing along about different people in Denver such as Lee Casey and Horace Stewart and Ray Humphreys and Gene Fowler and Jack and Frankie Foster and Jack Carberry and Joe Cook and Joe McMeel, and this Tom Ryan he knew them all and so did I and the two women couldn't get a word in.

"You ever know Phil Van Cise?" I said. "Know him!" roared Tom Ryan. "Why, God Almighty, Phil's been a friend of mine for years!" And we both knew Walden Sweet and we gave old J. Foster Symes a going over and talked about Sid Whipple and Mister Nowatney the bootlegger, and after a while I suddenly realized that I liked this Tom Ryan a lot, and I knew the main reason.

I have already spoken about the gosh-sayers I have encountered among the traveling American males — the men whose profanity

consists of four-letter words, viz.: gosh, heck and darn — and of my despair over the disappearance of good flamboyant cussing among these wife-ridden guys, who are not only namby, but more than a little pamby. And then I meet this guy Tom Ryan, a leading citizen of Denver, but a real outspoken Western frontier by god windmill fixer if I ever saw one. Trouble with Tom was, his voice carries. There in the hotel bar I had to tone him down a few times because he always talks as if he were addressing a jury, except for the words. And while I consider myself the champion cusser east of the Mississippi, having been brought up properly by an indulgent and talented father, I freely confess that I couldn't hold a candle to Tom Ryan, counsellor-at-law, ret. He knows all the words that I know, and a few extra, and he uses them judiciously, without restraint, in the right spots, in the correct juxtaposition, and he is better than me because he is a born Westerner and also he has a few years on me. I am happy that I will be traveling to Australia and New Zealand with him on the *Mariposa*. I intend to sit at his feet and learn.

Later we roamed around town with Chief Purser Jim Yonge, watching the preparations for a big street carnival scheduled for downtown Papeete tomorrow. Jim, who is a sort of Mother Superior to all cruise passengers, is having his problems as usual. Among a multitude of other duties, he conducts the Protestant service in the ship's theater each Sunday morning. Soon after leaving San Francisco on the present cruise a woman from a Midwestern city came to him and said she is a soloist in a Christian Science church back home, and she would like to sing a solo at the ship's services. Jim agreed to this and the woman decided that she would sing "Put More Loving in Your Living." Now came the real trouble. There is also on board a lady from the hill country of Kentucky who is a pucker whistler. There are two kinds of professional whistlers — pucker and finger. This pucker whistler heard that the Christian Science woman is going to sing at Divine Services, and so she came charging down on Jim Yonge and said that she wants to whistle at Divine Services. "Whistle what?" asked Jim. "Oh," she said, "I can whistle anything. I do all the standard bird calls, and I whistle at Divine Services back in Kentucky ah-wull the tahn."

The chief purser picked up the schedule for the coming Sunday and noted the musical numbers that had been listed, over and above the soloist's piece. They were "Come Thou Almighty King," "My Faith Looks Up to Thee," and "Eternal Father, Strong to Save." In his own mind he decided against having any of these hymns whistled. He didn't think it would set well with his little congregation. You can never tell about church congregations — they are capable of violent action. So Jim put the pucker whistler off for the time

being with the firm intention of telling her later that he cannot accommodate her. I told him I thought he was wrong, that this Kentucky woman might eventually become world-famous, traveling the Chautauqua circuit with Bird Calls for God, and then Jim could always say that he knew her when, and even helped her along her way.

"If," I argued, "you will let her whistle a couple of hymns next Sunday, I promise you that I will attend Divine Services."

"That settles it," said Jim. "I don't want you there. No whistling."

March 3

THE LAST DAY.

After three months we have a feeling of being settled in, of being a part of Tahiti. We know all the streets and all the stores and we have become accustomed to the routines involved in island living. We have also become accustomed to certain things that we'll miss after we leave: coconut bread, for example, which is simply regular bread with a slight coconut flavor. A loaf of coconut bread is laid aside for us every other day by the little Chinese girls at Fanao. We know that when a Matson ship docks, in a matter of a few hours the stores will have all kinds of frozen foods, including Sara Lee pastries and Oregon apples and, most important of all, New Zealand meat that is often very good.

We have learned to accept the philosophy of *manana* as it prevails here. We drive downtown with a list of, say, six errands. We'll strike a nice average if we accomplish three of them in an entire morning. Nelle has dealt with several of Papeete's dressmakers and she reports that the procedures here are not the way they are back home. On the first visit the dressmaker will take a lot of measurements and write them in a book and say come back maybe tomorrow afternoon. On the second visit she will have a shapeless sort of cloth sack ready. It will be obvious that she has paid no attention to the cryptograms in her book. She pins the sack onto the customer and writes down some more hieroglyphics and says come back two days hence. Fitting after fitting, with perhaps six visits in all and two or three postponements, and finally the dress is ready. That is the procedure for the steady customers. If you should be a passenger on a cruise ship arriving in the morning and leaving the same day, those Papeete dressmakers can run you up a fine frock just as fast as the Swift & Company machines can put a skin around a frankfurter.

Nelle also has a request to make of all American travelers, including those who have never been to Tahiti. Please, she begs, don't say Pap-eet. Say Papa-ay-tay.

The gentleman grouch of Punaauia, the alimony-escapee who declared war on roosters, said to me a few days ago: "Do us all a favor. Go back and write your book about us. Say the cockroaches are as big as armadillos and the spiders as big as dinner plates, and the mosquitoes all loaded with elephantiasis and malaria and yellow fever. Write filthy, nasty things about us. Say we are all fairies and lesbians and rapists. Say that the native Tahitians are sneak thieves and sex maniacs and all the women have syphilis. Go ahead. Write your mother-loving book that way, *so the goddamned dopey ignorant*

meddling tourists will stay the hell away and leave us alone!"

This man, and all the other Americans of Tahiti, are really happy in the life they have found here. They gripe and groan about the French *fonctionnaires*, about their arrogance and their unending antagonism toward the Americans. But for all their complaining, you wouldn't be able to get them off the island with fifty-megaton firecrackers.

There has been a lack of efficient management on the part of the French administrators but I suspect it to be deliberate, and a good thing. The French are inclined to leave the Tahitians to their own atavistic methods of enjoying life and there are almost no regulations affecting the two vital pursuits: drinking and amour (not necessarily in that order). Meanwhile the French, as you may have heard, are quite capable of doing a little enjoying on their own. It is nice to have a spot on our neglected planet where such conditions prevail; them that don't like it can damn well go back where they came from. In almost all things having to do with sex our two cultures are opposed and antipodean. Romantic love, as we know it, is looked upon as a pretty silly business by the Tahitians. To them a person who would say, "I will love you and be faithful to you till the day I die," that person is a nut of purest ray serene.

Most of the *vahines* who live with the aging Americans and Europeans take a coffee break from time to time with more vigorous lovers. The children resulting from such bouts are accepted into the homes of the *popaa* masters without question and treated as members of the family. I know people who say flatly that they think this is a good system. We had lunch one day at the home of a fading *popaa* whose *vahine* was the mother of a seven-year-old boy. I observed that the master spent a lot of time looking at the child, and would call him to his knee and hold his head and stare into his face and then say, "Look at his nose. Same shape nose as I got. I believe the little bastard is beginning to look like me."

Would I like to live in Tahiti? Yes and no. The beauty of the land and the sea is surely unequaled anywhere on earth, and the climate suits me perfectly. The place has a small town, villagey character cross-pollinated with an international flavor. There is more to it than coconut bread and unbridled license (the best kind) and frangipani. Out of every three persons on the island, two are offbeat characters and the third is an unequivocal screwball. The people of Tahiti are never dull. We have long since become accustomed to the bugs and pay them no mind. We could learn to be satisfied with the available food. But there is that one big fat drawback. Red tape. They seem to have a monopoly of it in Tahiti. Some people have no great objection to it, and actually appear to enjoy demonstrating their own

officiousness in the face of bureaucratic officiousness. I don't. I don't like to stand in line, or sit in anterooms. I don't like to have *fonctionnaires* give me the beady eye. And I wouldn't want to live in a land where, come tomorrow morning, they might throw me the hell out.

I must say a few concluding words about the Tahitian girl as a lover. In spite of the magic potions of Old Doctor Tallien, I want it understood that my approach to this matter is altogether objective. During our stay I have cross-examined quite a few American men on Topic A. Let's face it — it is the one big question in the mind of every man back home when he hears the word Tahiti. Are those girls as great in the hay as they are cracked up to be?

The answer is no.

Let me recapitulate in regard to the physical charms of the Tahitian girl. One out of twenty could be called beautiful and it may well be that she has false teeth, and it's likely that her feet are big, with soles like leather. She is sensuous and often eager for the mattress but only in the same way that at certain times she gets hungry and eats. The gentlemen of Tahiti, almost to a man, have told me that when it comes to the arts of love, the verdict goes to the white woman. An American bachelor who has been here five or six years and who has made the conquest of women his life work and who has had dealings with native girls and the wives of French *fonctionnaires* and tourist ladies and the wives of American residents and rich widows from Pasadena and visiting Enzedders and Australians and maybe even an occasional nanny goat, this gentleman summed it up for me:

“The average American woman is far more interesting in bed than the average *vahine*. Sex has been withheld and, in a sense, forbidden to the American girl, and there is a mystery surrounding it and therefore a brief affair with a man becomes a dramatic thing in her eyes. She makes a big important thing out of it. She wants all the preliminaries and all the frills and she throws herself into the game with everything she's got. With the Tahitian girl, the preliminaries are a waste of time and a bore. She wants to get right down to the crux of the matter. And she does.”

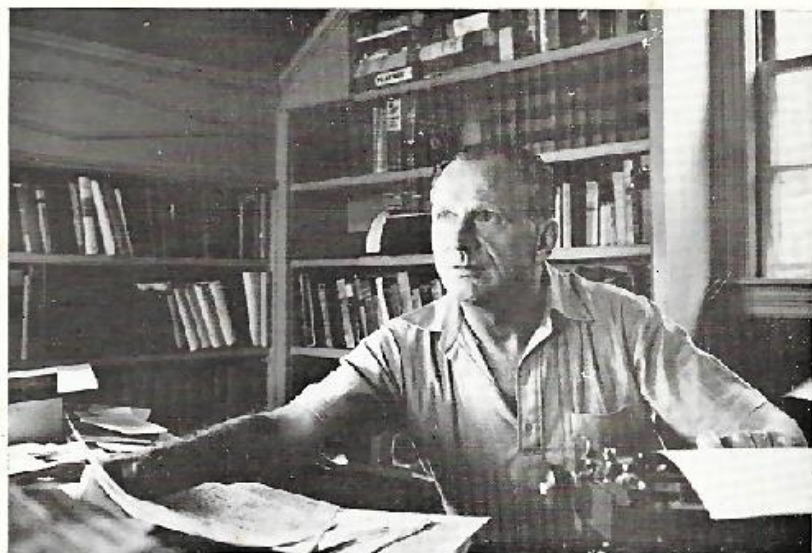
This man and other hedonists told me that there are occasional exceptions. There do exist Tahitian women, often part French or part Chinese, who are endowed with incredible talents. If you have the

good fortune to get one of these, then you've got yourself a volcano, a mountain of fire.

That's what the boys tell me.

When I was growing up in the Midwest there was a colloquial saying, used to describe a girl who was frigid and indifferent during the act of love. It went: "All the way through she just laid there eatin' an apple." With the average Tahitian girl, it will more likely be a mango.

Finally, let me say that if you are a person whose doctor has said you must give up drinking, Tahiti is a fine place to go. It is a place to escape from the horror of total abstention—by drinking. You will be so far away from your doctor that he'll never know about it. Unless you happen to be a damn fool like me, and tell all about it in a book.



Paul Berg

One of America's most popular humorists, H. Allen Smith, is the author of such books as **LOW MAN ON A TOTEM POLE**, **THE AGE OF THE TAIL**, **WRITE ME A POEM, BABY**, **THE FIG IN THE BARBER SHOP**, **WAIKIKI BEACHNIK**, and **HOW TO WRITE WITHOUT KNOWING NOTHING**. When not exploring such exotic spots as Tahiti and the South Seas, Mr. Smith and his wife Nelle make their home in Mt. Kisco, New York.